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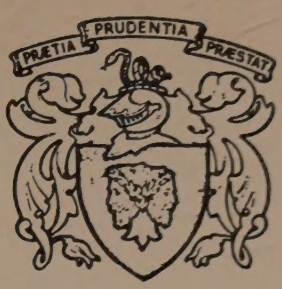

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THE UNLIGHTED LUSTRE

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THE UNLIGHTED LUSTRE

ADDRESSES
FROM A GLASGOW PULPIT

BY THE REV.
G. H. MORRISON, M.A.
GLASGOW

HODDER AND STOUGHTON
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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TO MY WIFE

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I

THE DISCIPLINE OF THOUGHT

Phil. iv. 8: 'Think on these things.'

When we speak of unseen things, we commonly refer to things that are eternal. We associate the unseen with the world beyond the veil, where the angels of God, innumerable, are around the throne. Now it is true that that is an unseen world, though the time is coming when our eyes shall see it; but we must never forget that far nearer to us than that there is another world which also is unseen. We live in a day of very strange discoveries, and look on many things that were once invisible. By means of our telescopes we see very distant stars; and we can watch the beating of our hearts. But the world of thought, of feeling, of passion and of desire—that world still baffles the finest powers of vision; as surely as there is an unseen heaven above us, there is an unseen universe within. What a mysterious and strange thing is life—a burning point, and round it what a shadow! How utterly must a man fail who walks by sight, and who will not recognise the

all-embracing mystery! Deep calleth unto deep, wherever man is—the invisible deep within to the unseen depths beyond. It is one distinguishing feature of the gospel that it never makes light of these great and awful things.

To-night, then, I wish to turn to the world within. I wish to speak for a little on our thoughts. For I believe that most of us give far too little heed to what I might call the discipline of thought. 'If there be any virtue, or any praise, think on these things.' First, I shall speak on the vital need there is of governing our thoughts. Next, on how the gospel helps men to this government.

First, then, on the government of our thoughts —and at the outset I would recognize the difficulty of it. I question if there is a harder task in all the world than that of bringing our thoughts into subjection to our will. It is very difficult to regulate our actions, yet there is a social pressure on our actions. It is supremely difficult to order our speech aright, yet speech is restrained and checked by countless barriers. Every time we act and every time we speak we come into direct contact with society, and prudence and self-love and reputation and business interests admonish us instantly to walk with caution. But thought is free—at least we think it is. It is transacted in a world where none observe it. The law cannot reach us for unclean imaginations. Think how we will of a man, he

cannot charge us with libel. All the prudential safeguards which God has set on speech, and all the deterrent motives which surround our deeds, are lacking when we enter the silent halls of thought. It is that—perhaps above all other things—which makes the management of thought so difficult. It is the secrecy—the absence of restraint—the imagined freedom of the world within. And yet there are one or two considerations I can bring before you, that will show you how, in the whole circle of self-mastery, there is nothing more vital than the mastery of thought.

Think, for example, how much of our happiness—our common happiness—depends on thought. We begin by imagining it depends on outward things; but we all grow to be wiser by and bye. 'There's nothing either good or bad,' says Shakespeare, 'but thinking makes it so.' Now of course that is only half a truth. There *are* things that in themselves are for ever good: and there are other things that eternally and everywhere are bad—never be juggled out of these moral certainties. But in between these everlasting fixities there lies a whole world of life and of experience, and what it shall mean for us—how we shall regard it—depends almost entirely upon thought. Our common happiness does not hang on what we view. Our common happiness hangs on our point of view. There are

men who can think themselves any day into a paradise, and others who think themselves into a fever. Have we not known or met or read of men and women who seemed to have everything this world could give, yet only to look at their faces or their portraits was to read the story of fret and discontent? But S. Francis of Assisi, that sweetest of all saints, sitting down to dine by the roadside on a few crusts of bread, was so exquisitely and radiantly happy that he could not find words enough for thankfulness. That then is an integral part of happiness—the discipline and the government of our thoughts. Largely, it is not things themselves, it is our thoughts about them, that constitute the gentle art of being happy.

Again I want you to consider this—how much of our unconscious influence lies in our thoughts. Not only by what we do and what we say, but by the kind of thoughts we are cherishing in secret, do we impress ourselves upon our neighbours, and help or hinder the little world we move in. That very suggestive and spiritual writer Mr Maeterlinck puts the matter in his own poetic way. He says, 'Though you assume the face of a saint, a hero or a martyr, the eye of the passing child will not greet you with the same unapproachable smile, if there lurk within you an evil thought.' Now probably there is a little exaggeration there; one thought, flashing and then expelled, may not reveal itself.

The totality of saintly character is too great to be overborne by the intrusion of one shadow of the devil. But this is certain that by the thoughts we harbour and let ourselves dwell upon and cherish in the dark, we touch and turn and influence our world when we never dream that we are doing it. There is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed —what a depth there is in that one word of Jesus! He is not merely thinking of God's judgment bar to-morrow. He is thinking of the undetected revelation of to-day. Christ recognised that the kind of thing we brood on, the kind of thought we allow ourselves to think, though it never utter itself in actual words, or clothe itself in the flesh and blood of deeds, encompasses and affects the life of others like a poisonous vapour or like a breath of spring. Your secret is not such a secret as you think. Why are men drawn to you? Why are men repelled by you? Why is it that sometimes we instinctively shrink from people in the very first hour that we meet them? It is because the heart—more powerful than any Röntgen ray —deciphers for itself the secret story: brushes past speech and deed into the hidden place, and apprehends the existence that is there. To think base thoughts is a sin against our neighbour as surely as it is a sin against ourselves. To be unclean even in imagination is to make it harder for others to be good. In the interests of our

influence, then, no less than of our happiness, you see the need of governing our thoughts.

There is only one other consideration that I would mention, and that is the power of thought in our temptations. In the government of thought —in the power to bring thought to heel—lies one of our greatest moral safeguards against sin. You have all read the words of Thomas A'Kempis, in that immortal book, 'The Imitation of Christ.' They occur in his thirteenth chapter, Of resisting Temptation. How does sin reach us? That is his question—and this is his never-to-be-forgotten answer to it: 'For first there cometh to the mind a bare thought of evil, then a strong imagination thereof, afterwards delight and evil motion, then consent.' First, a bare thought—that is the beginning, and it is then that the government of thought means heaven or hell. For if a man has disciplined himself to crush that thought—which may come to the purest and holiest mind—still better, if he has acquired the power to change the current, and to turn his thought instantly into other and nobler channels, temptation is baffled at its very start, and the man stands upon his feet victorious. A man will never regulate his passions who has never learned to regulate his thoughts. If we cannot master our besetting thoughts, we shall never master our besetting sins. I think you see, then, that in the interests of morality,

no less than in the interests of our happiness and influence, it is supremely necessary that we all give heed to the great subject of thought—discipline.

So now in the second place, and very briefly, I wish to ask how the gospel helps us to that. I wish to ask why a Christian above all other men has powers available for governing his thought. To some of you the mastery of thought may seem impossible—it is never viewed as impossible in Scripture, and the secret of that gospel-power lies in the three great words—light, love, life.

Think first of light as a power for thought-mastery. We all know how light affects our thoughts. In twilight or darkness what sad thoughts come thronging, which the glory of sunlight instantly dispels. I have a dear friend who is a terrible sufferer, and who rarely has any quiet sleep after three in the morning, and the worst of wakening then, he tells me, is that that is just the time when everything seems melancholy, cheerless, hopeless. We need the light if we are to see things truly. We need the light if we are to think aright. And the glory of Christ is that by His life and death He has shed a light where before there was only darkness. What had the old and beautiful religion of the Greeks to say when a man was confronted by sorrow or disease? It was dumb, it turned away its head in silence;

it had no light to shed upon the mystery—till men, having no light to think by, lost all thought-control, and wandered into a labyrinth of evil. But the sufferings of Christ have shed a light on suffering. The death of Christ has shed a light on death. Faced by the worst now, and called to bear the cross, we can think bravely and luminously of it all. The light of Christ, for the man who lives in it, is an untold help in the government of thought.

Then think of love—Is it not one mark of love that our thoughts always follow in its train? A love that never thought about the loved one would be the most heartless and hopeless of all mockeries. A man who is deeply in love with a good woman thinks of her every hour of the day, and there is no such certain sign of love's decay as the dying out of gentle and sweet thoughtfulness. *That* sign a woman instantly detects—it is the unuttered tragedy of countless lives—and the sorrow of it springs from the intuition that thought is under the mastery of love. Do you see then how the gospel helps us to thought-government? At the very centre of its message it puts love. It shows us a Saviour who lived and died for us and who stretches out His pierced hands towards us. It speaks of Gethsemane and Calvary, and at its burning heart reveals a love that passes the love of women. 'Simon son of Jonas, lovest

thou Me?'—that will determine the current and trend of thought. That master-passion is the power of God for bringing every thought into captivity. If the love of a woman can control and purge our thoughts, how much more the love of Jesus Christ!

Then think of life—are not our thoughts affected by the largeness and abundance of our life? When life is poor and feeble, base thoughts scent us out as the vultures of the desert scent out the dying traveller. Half of the vile or bitter thoughts we think are the children of our lustreless and unprofitable days. Expand the horizon—get a new breath of life—and they take to themselves wings and fly away. Now what did Christ say about His coming? I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly. Life is expanded and filled with undreamed-of fulness when we live in the glad fellowship of Jesus. And that great tide of life, like the tide of the sea that covers up the mudbanks, is the greatest power in the moral world for submerging every base and bitter thought. Do you know anything of that light—that love—that life? What a deal we miss in ignoring Jesus Christ! The king's daughter is all beautiful *within*—just because her king is her Redeemer.

II

THE LEAGUE WITH THE STONES

Job v. 23: 'Thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field.'

In these long June days when the world is so fresh and green, our thoughts turn instinctively to the ministry of nature. I should think there are few here this evening who have not been made happier lately by the wonder and the beauty of the world. It is true that God hath made everything beautiful in its time, so that no one month has a monopoly of charm. To the seeing eye and the observing heart, December and January are full of a stern majesty. But June is so fresh, so sweet, so full of light, so throbbing and thrilling with love and hope and joy, that the dullest and most world-weary heart beats a little faster at the touch of its mystic fingers. There is always an element of surprise in June. It is always a new thing, fresh, and unexpected. We have had it annually since our childhood, yet when it comes again it is as a stranger from the glory. That is one mark of the genius of God—His gifts come so regularly yet they never weary. They reach us a thousand times, but the thousand

and first time they are still wonderful, surprising, touched with dew. If a church is wearisome I utterly distrust it. I should never allow my children to be brought up in it. And I distrust dull churches, however orthodox they be, just because they are hopelessly out of touch with June. I should like my children to feel that all things are a unity: that the summer and the sacraments are kin; that the pealing of the organ and the song of birds are part of the one hymn that rises heavenward, for the Creator and the Father of Christ are one.

Now, turning to our text, what does it mean—thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field. Well, the whole of its significance lies in the kind of man who is implied in *thou*. Eliphaz is talking—not of everybody—he is talking of the man who trusts in God. He is describing the man who is at peace with God, and who has entered into a covenant with the Almighty. And what he says is, Are you in league with heaven? then with the very stones you shall be in league. Are you at peace with God in your own heart? then you are on new terms with every bird, and beast, and flower. That is to say that a man's attitude towards nature, and all the meaning that nature may convey to him, depends on his spiritual and moral state. It is not so much by the eye as by the heart that the book of this summer world

must be interpreted. Let a man live basely and in defiance of God, let him mock at these moral laws which are our safeguard, then somehow there will be no runes on any rock for him; he will be out of harmony with tree and flower and summer. But let a man be reverent and lowly and pure in heart and tender, let him be at peace with that Jehovah who delights in love — then in the covenant of comradeship June will unfold her secrets to him, and he will read sermons in the stones of the field. It is not the artistic nature, it is the moral nature that holds the key to the ministry of summer. It is of the man who plays the hero in life's battle that Wordsworth says 'flowers laugh before him in their beds.' To be out of touch with God and God's ideal is to be out of touch with everything; but to be spiritually in league with God is to be in league with the stones of the field.

This vital connection of the outward world with the grandeur or debasement of man's moral nature, is one of the great and neglected truths of Scripture. From the story of Eden, with its idyllic environment, through the fall with its curse of thistles and of thorns, on to the last picture of a new-created earth that shall be in harmony with new-created man, everywhere the word of God shows us the kinship between nature and the moral life of man. Does Israel forsake God and

turn to idols? Carmel languishes and Lebanon mourns. Does Israel repent and turn to its God again? The wilderness shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. That is not the idle metaphor of poetry: to the prophet, nature was instinct with spiritual meaning. There was not an anemone in all the plain of Sharon but would be more beautiful if only man were good. Then think of the nature-parables of Jesus, which are based on deep unities, not on chance resemblances. Think of what Paul says, 'The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together,'—that is the Bible outlook on the world. The world is not a mere stage for a brief play. It is lit by our triumphs, shadowed by our guilt, touched by our sorrows, watered by our tears. By every right thing we do it is made richer. It grows meaner and poorer by every sin we sin. It is ourselves which are impressed upon the world. It is the story of our own hearts we read in nature. We talk of the voices of the winds and waves, but the voices are only the echo of our souls. And that is why when you get a soul like Christ's, infinitely beautiful, and filled like a chalice with God, the meanest flower that blows has got a glory with which even the glory of Solomon cannot be compared.

And when we turn from Scripture to the great poets who are our best interpreters of man and

nature, we feel at once that the same truth is theirs—that man is in league with the stones of the field. For in the greatest poets nature is more than a background against which the drama of human passion is played out. It enters into the spirit of the tragedy; it catches and reflects the hero's temper; in its storm and its sunshine, its fragrance and its rain it replies to the joys and the passions of the heart. When Lorenzo and Jessica make love, in Shakespeare, every star in heaven is singing like an angel. When Julius Cæsar is going to be murdered, the night is full of wild alarm and portent. When the agony of King Lear reaches its climax, when he is sightless and outcast and goaded into madness, nature responds with her own inarticulate agony, and there is thunder and lightning and uproar of the elements. Do you think all that is but a poet's dream? The dreams of the poet are sometimes the deepest truth. It is the witness of Shakespeare that God has made a harmony between the moods of nature and the passions of mankind. That is the meaning of the storm in Lear. That is the meaning of the Forest of Arden. As a man is, so is the world to him—as is his heart so is his league with nature. By everything we suffer, all we do, by the hopes we cherish and the crosses we bear, new notes are heard in the music of the summer and new meanings are inscribed upon its scroll.

A thought like that has got this value, too, that it brings nature into living union with the Bible. For that is one mark of our inspired scripture, that it alters and deepens with our deepening life. There are books that charm us infinitely when we read them first, but when we come back to them again the charm is gone. We have loved or sinned or suffered in the interval, and the old volume can never satisfy us now. But if one thing is certain in the world that thing is this, that the word of God liveth and abideth for ever. We never exhaust it, never can outgrow it, never reach an experience that it does not know. It is the same book in every hand and home—Genesis and John are always in it. The schoolboy's copy that he carries in his satchel, and the well-worn copy by the bedside of old age—syllable for syllable they are the same. Yet what a different book it is in school days from what it is in the valley of the shadow, and the difference is not in the print, but in the heart. Joys have illumined it, sorrows have enriched it, tears have transfigured it, prayers have unlocked it. The rocking of the cradle has explained its love, and the open grave its message of eternity. Fatherhood, motherhood, loneliness, disappointment—all that we strive to be, all that we fail to be—these things transform into ten thousand messages the one book that is in everybody's hand. My point is that there is

another book written by the same finger and inspired. It too has its Genesis and we call it January. It too has its Revelation and we call it June. And if it did not rise and fall with us just as the Bible does, if it were not enriched or ennobled by all we strive to be, I could never believe that its writing was inspired by the same hand as gave us Holy Scripture.

To go a little more into detail, there are one or two facts I wish you to observe, and the first is how the world is enriched by memory.[1] Of all the powers of the human heart there is none that is quite so skilled as memory in hallowing the beauty of the world. I fancy there are many streams as fair as Doon, and many a ruined kirk nobler than Alloway, but it is to Doon and Alloway that the thousands journey, because of the poet who sung and who sorrowed there. And there are towns worthier of being seen than Stratford, and parks more beautiful than those of Charlcote, but the memories of Shakespeare cluster there, and consecrate these spots for ever. And Nazareth—yes, Nazareth is always beautiful, and the hills would have been exquisitely green to-day even if Joseph and Mary had never lived and loved. But ah! what a charm—what an unspeakable glory falls on Nazareth through the one memory of Jesus

[1] I have taken this passage from 'The Religious Uses of Memory' in my 'Flood-Tide.'

Christ. I knew a woman who was reared amid the bleak moors of Caithness, and she went into service and spent the summers by Loch Lomond. And the islands and all the birch-clad hills and all the lights and shadows of the loch meant little to her. It was the moors that were beautiful to her, for in the moors were the memories of home. Have you no Bethel? No valley of decision? No room, no street—no field where you cried, Get thee behind me, Satan? One memory like that makes the world royal—calls out a new glory in it—consecrates it. Give a man one bright memory like that, and he shall be in league with the stones of the field.

And the other fact is how sin degrades the world: how it casts a shadow on the face of nature. One sin can spoil the glory of a soul; it can also spoil the glory of a summer. In that beautiful poem of Tennyson's—the Idylls of the King—a poem that spite of all criticism will be a joy for ever, I know no passage more perfect or suggestive than that in which the little novice speaks of Queen Guinevere. Before Queen Guinevere came, and before she sinned, the land was alive with spiritual presences. Strange song was heard and there was the shining of beacon-lights 'far on into the rich heart of the west.' In every cavern and cleft there was some little elf making music like the music of a distant horn.

And as the knight, pure in heart and true to God, rode through the forest on his way to Camelot—'Himself beheld three spirits mad with joy come dashing down on a tall wayside flower.' Then came Queen Guinevere and sinned and fell, and the light and the joy and the music were withdrawn. The beacons disappeared, the caves were empty, the forests were cheerless and desolate and lonely. Now what connexion was there between the sin of Guinevere and the headlands and woods and meadows of fair England? Had you asked Tennyson that question, he might have answered that he did not know. But he felt, with one of those spontaneous feelings which are more weighty than a score of arguments, that June was less beautiful, and the song of its birds less sweet, because of the moral guilt of Guinevere. Have you never felt that, when you have lived unworthily? Do you mean to say it makes no difference to the world? Is the sun not brighter and the sound of the wind more stirring when you are good than when you are living poorly? We quicken or deaden everything we see by the life we live and the sins that we commit. For a bad man there is really no summer, just as there is really no heaven.

So we come back to where we started from—thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field. What this summer shall mean to you, and how you shall enjoy it, is after all a moral and

spiritual question. To be at peace with God is to be at peace with nature, and to love God is to see traces of Him everywhere. That is the truth which Eliphaz is uttering: that is the truth which we must try to practise. Make up your mind to-night that if you live unworthily the peace and power of summer shall escape you. Make up your mind that the secret of the Lord is only and always with the heart that fears Him. I cannot explain that truth. I am not here to explain it. The mysteries by which we live are all inexplicable. I only know that as is my heart with God, so is the world of this fresh June to me.

III

ASHAMED OF CHRIST

Luke ix. 26: 'For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.'

I CAN understand how men were ashamed of Christ as He moved about the villages of Galilee. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief then, and men hid as it were their faces from Him. Born in a humble and malodorous village—can any good thing come out of Nazareth?—living in the deepest obscurity for thirty years, then suddenly appearing with a claim to be Messiah yet contradicting the warmest hopes of Israel—it is not to be wondered at that there was disappointment, and that many were ashamed of Jesus and His words.

But the thing that is difficult to understand is how any man can be ashamed of Jesus now. For now He is no longer rejected and despised: He is enthroned in heaven at the right hand of God. We can understand a man denying that Christ rose—there are many who honestly believe that He still sleeps; but the man who is ashamed of

Christ is not an unbeliever; you cannot be ashamed of that which has no existence. The man who is ashamed credits the resurrection—get him alone and he will not deny it. The man who is ashamed credits that Christ is living and is energetic in human hearts to-day; and the mystery is how crediting all that, it should be possible to be ashamed of Christ. That it is possible every one of us here knows, and it is on that strange possibility I wish to speak. First, I shall touch on the revelation of this shame; next on the roots of it; and thirdly on some remedies in our power.

First, then, I wish to speak about its revelation, about the way in which this shame of Christ betrays itself: and the first feature that rises before me is *concealment*. Is there any man or woman of whom you are ashamed? Think of them and call up their names while I am speaking. Well, however else your shame may show itself, it will at least have this mark—you are ashamed to be seen with them in public. In private, that is a different matter: you have no objection to meeting them in private. In the pressure of a great crowd, that is a different matter, for any two may be cast together in a crowd. But when you are ashamed of a man you are ashamed of being openly seen with him, you are ashamed of walking in broad daylight through the streets with him; and as that is a feature of all shame between man

and man, it is a mark of the man ashamed of Christ. Remember we may be ashamed of Christ although in the quiet hour we pray in secret. Remember we may be ashamed of Him although at the stated times we come to church. For in the one case—in private prayer—there is a solitude, and in the other—in public worship—is a crowd; and neither in solitude nor in the throng is the shame or glory of the heart detected. It is as we walk through the streets of daily life; it is as we take up our task in homely scenes; it is as we go about our work and mingle with our friends—it is there that our heart's loyalty shall be seen. If we honour Christ men will perceive the friendship. If we are ashamed of Him we shall conceal it.

The second feature of all shame is *silence*. There is a close and mysterious tie between the two. The feeling of shame whenever it is operative has a way of putting a seal upon the lips. A child will babble and prattle all day long, and spin out a history about its small adventures; but let it do anything of which it is ashamed, and not a word will it speak concerning that. How many homes there are in which one son or daughter has come to disgrace, till the parents' hearts are breaking! Does the stranger entering that home talk of the prodigal? Is not that the one name that is never mentioned? There are ceaseless yearnings and there are secret prayers rising to

heaven daily for the wanderer; but mingling with every thought of him is shame, and one great witness of that shame is silence. Now far be it from me even to suggest that all our silence about Christ is such. There is a reserve which is dignified and right when we move among august and holy things. Still, hours will come in every Christian life when confession is imperative and clearly called for, and if in such hours there be not speech but silence, the silence is the stamp and sign of shame.

The third witness of shame lies in *avoidance*. We avoid instinctively what we are ashamed of. When an architect has designed a building of which he is proud, I can imagine his delight in looking at it. I can imagine him going out of his way by half a dozen streets just to get one more glimpse of his conception. But let the building be a failure, and the man ashamed of it—he is not eager to feast his eyes upon it. *Now* he does all in his power to avoid it, and he avoids it because he is ashamed. I fancy that most of us know places such as that, for we are all the architects of our own fortunes: places that are disgraced for us by wretched memories, tarnished and desecrated by some sin; and we too, as we journey through the years, are glad to avoid such scenes, and we avoid them because we are ashamed. Avoidance is one sign and seal of shame. Can it

be said of you that you are avoiding Christ? If so, however you may explain it to yourself, depend upon it you are ashamed of Him.

So far then of the revelation of this shame: now a word or two upon the roots of it. Whence does it spring? How is it born? What possible cause can there be for this so tragic feeling? It will be best to keep close to Scripture in our answer.

Sometimes we are ashamed of Christ through *fear*. We are ashamed as Nicodemus was. He came to Jesus by stealth and in the night-time, and he came so because he feared the Jews. In his heart of hearts he profoundly admired the Lord—we can do that, and yet be ashamed of Him—but he was a public man, a master in Israel, living in the fierce light that beat upon a rabbi, and he was afraid and he crept to the Lord by night, and the root and basis of his shame was fear. My impression is that fear is at the root of far more things than most of us ever dream of. There are even virtues on which men pride themselves which a little more courage would instantly destroy. The Bible never reiterates in vain, and do you know the command that occurs most often in Scripture? The commonest command in Scripture is Fear not. Now we are not in bodily peril like Nicodemus; no one will slay us for being out and out. The day of the thumbscrew and of the

stake and of the Solway tide—that day, we may thank God, is gone for ever; but though that day is gone, fear has not departed. For in the intricate mechanism of modern society there is ample room for subtler and finer fear—fear lest one's business suffer, fear for one's prospects, fear for the welfare of one's wife and children; and who does not know how often tongues are tied and lips are silenced and confession stifled, through the haunting of a vague fear like that? I do not wish to speak harshly of that temper: I know how hard it is sometimes to be true. There are inevitable and unavoidable accommodations which the wheels-within-wheels of modern life demand. Still, there is such a thing as being ashamed of Christ—if there were not, the words would not be written—and at the root of it to-day as in Jerusalem, may be the promptings of unmanly fear.

Again the cause of this shame may be *social pressure*. We may be ashamed of Christ as Simon Peter was. And the amazing thing is that in such a leal and loving heart there should have been any room for shame at all. But Peter sat by the fire in the courtyard, and they taunted him with his discipleship; and then the girl who kept the wicket recognised him, and every one present was antagonistic; and Peter denied his Lord—Peter was ashamed of Him—and the shame had its

source in his society. Had it not been for Peter's company that night, we should never have had the tale of Peter's fall. Alone, in the dark streets, with what a burning loyalty he would have lifted up his heart to his great leader! But Peter was impressionable, easily influenced, quick to receive the impact of environment, and his society made him ashamed of Christ. Are there none to-day who are like Simon Peter? Are there none who deny Christ because of social pressure? Are there none who are silent and afraid to speak because of the men and women who surround them? In careless homes, in crowded shops or offices, in football clubs, in social gatherings, is not the old tragedy re-enacted sometimes, and does not their company make men ashamed of Christ?

One other reason only would I mention, and that is *intellectual pride*. There are not a few instances in the book of Acts, of shame which sprang from a certain pride of intellect. When a minister whom I know well was on the point of entering the ministry, the late Dr Moody Stuart, a saint and a scholar, happened to walk up and down his garden with him. And the talk fell on the ministry, and on its joys and sorrows, on the love that inspires it and on the hopes that cheer it; when the Doctor turned sharply on his young friend and said, 'Mr C., are you willing to be a fool for Christ's sake?' It was an apposite

and pertinent question. There must be something of that willingness in every Christian—the gospel is so simple, so free from subtle intricacy, so entirely, in the heart of it, a gift. And men are ashamed of Christ because His message is so plain that the illiterate peasant can live by it and die by it. There is nothing so alien in the world to pride of intellect as the life and the words and the sacrifice of Jesus. Here is the great offence of Calvary in intellectual and cultured ages—it is that in Calvary there is a fact which the mind alone is powerless to explain. I bring my learning of a thousand books there, and I cannot fathom its mystery and meaning. It only speaks home to my dark and baffled heart when 'Nothing in my hand I bring.'

In closing, what are the remedies for this besetting shame? I shall just mention two, and then to our homes.

The first is, Endeavour to realise who Jesus is. If you had lived in London in the times of Queen Elizabeth you might have met two men walking together; and the one by his rich dress and his attendants you would recognise as the Earl of Southampton. But who is the other so plainly and carelessly dressed; and is not my lord ashamed to be seen with him? The other is the profoundest intellect God ever fashioned—the other is William Shakespeare. I do not think we should care much about dress, if

we had the chance of a walk and a talk with Shakespeare. He would be a strange creature who would be ashamed to be seen anywhere in such immortal company. And did we but realise who *He* is, whom we name and whom we seek to follow, the very thought of shame would grow ridiculous. Who are you, tell me that—a merchant or a minister? a teacher or a doctor or a clerk? And who is Christ?—the King immortal and eternal, the Wonderful, the mighty God, the Counsellor! When I put it that way does it not seem absurd even to dream of being ashamed of Christ? And no one really likes to be absurd.

And then endeavour to realise what Christ has done for you. That after all is the great cure of shame. When we once feel deeply all that we owe to Him, the black bat, shame, has flown. I could understand a young fellow about town being ashamed to walk through the streets with an old-fashioned and lame country-woman. But if the old-fashioned and lame country-woman is his mother—God have mercy on him if he feels shame then! For she cradled him and she watched him night and day, and she nursed him in fever and she prayed for him; and never a day has passed since he left home but her thought has gone out in a great longing to him; and who with a spark of manhood in his heart could ever dare to be ashamed of one who had rendered

service so great and rich as that? Yet all the service of the dearest mother is not one tithe of what we owe to Christ. He loved us and He gave Himself for us. He saved us and called us, and has made us heirs of heaven. Just think of it. Try to realise it. Call it up as you walk home from church to-night. Then from the heart you will be able to sing

> 'I'm not ashamed to own my Lord,
> Or to defend His cause.'

IV

THE UNLIGHTED LUSTRE

Psalm xxxvi. 9: 'In Thy light shall we see light.'

In the 'Life of Sir Walter Scott' by Lockhart, there occurs a remark made by Sir Walter that has often come back to me in quiet moments. It was on the occasion when Lockhart first met Scott, at a small gathering of friends in Edinburgh, and after dinner the talk fell on living poets, with many of whom Scott was on terms of intimacy. A reverend gentleman present—a Principal from St Andrews—was lamenting that he had never seen Byron, and Scott fell to talk on the beauty of Byron's face. 'Doctor,' he said, 'the prints give you no idea of it: the lustre is there, but it is not lighted up.' I confess that I have been haunted by that sentence—the lustre is there but it is not lighted up. It seems to me so pregnant and so suggestive that I shall take it for my theme this evening. First I shall speak a little on unlighted lustre: then secondly, on some of the ways in which it is kindled.

Think to begin with of this world we dwell in,

with all its beauty of hill and stream and sea. From the lights and shadows of the highland moor down to the droop of the birch tree at the door, there is such a lustre of glory on the world that to some hearts it is a joy for ever. But for centuries men had no eyes for that, the ancient world had little feeling for it all. They dreaded the thunder and they feared the sea, but the charm and mystery of nature had hardly touched them. And to-day in Africa where there are snow-capped hills, and lochs and rivers, and all the splendours of sunset, you might search through a thousand villages of native tribes and not find one heart responsive to the magic. I remember standing one evening at a wayside station: it was a perfect night, and the moon was in all her splendour: one would have thought that the most callous heart would have been awed into reverence by such a scene. But a man standing near me called his neighbour's attention to it, and the neighbour looked at it for half a moment, and then remarked that it was like the foot-lights. Poor soul, that in all the glory of God's handiwork could only find some cheap resemblance to a theatre! Now I do not know anything about that man; and I do not tell that story to condemn him. I only remark that for him, and for all antiquity, and for multitudes in the wide world to-night, the lustre is there, but it is not lighted up.

Again I think for a moment of the Bible. There is not a home represented here but has its Bible. I question if there is one man in church to-night who does not possess a copy of the Scriptures. It is the same book in every hand and home. There is not one iota of difference in the copies. From the majestic opening 'In the beginning, God'—down to the 'Amen' that closes Revelation, chapter for chapter, syllable for syllable, all copies are identical. Yet to one man the Bible *is* the Bible, a book of infinite comfort and power and healing: and to another it is just so many printed pages within two covers that are rarely opened. The lustre is there, but it is not lighted up. Isaiah and the Psalms and the gospel of John are in the neglected as in the studied volume. But the lamp is not kindled from the fire of God, the light of all lights has never set it burning; the power and the beauty are all there; the pity is they are not lighted up.

Once more, I apply this thought to human character, to the men and women whom we meet with daily; for I think that one of the saddest facts in life is just this fact of the unlighted lustre. I daresay most of us have had one schoolfellow from whom we expected very brilliant things: he was so able, so quick, he worked with such charming ease that we thought that by and bye he could do anything. Ah, well, the years

have been slipping by since then, and somehow our schoolmate has done nothing yet. And we meet him occasionally and he is always brilliant—the lustre is there, there is no doubt of it: but the man's whole life is going to be a failure because the lustre has not been lighted up. No purpose or passion has infused his character. No spark of the fire that is from heaven has kindled him. He has never set himself to face life's duties in the brave spirit of an earnest man. And all the gifts that might have meant so much, and all the graces that never come to anything, and the boundless possibilities of common hearts that only want one touch to kindle them—such things, and the love that can never show itself, are the unlighted lustre of the soul.

So much, then, for the unlighted lustre, and now a few words on how the lustre is kindled; and here I shall confine myself to human life, for that practically embraces all the rest. Now there are three great ways in which the lustre is kindled, and they are associated with three great words. The first word is responsibility; the second is love; and the third is conversion.

First, then, that is one great gain of responsibility: it is one of God's ways of lighting up the lustre. Responsibility develops a man's powers, and rouses him into the enthusiasm of activity; it is like the sunlight falling on the seed and making

it quicken into leaf and flower. That is how a great cause or a great time ennobles men; it lays the pressure of a great need upon them; and when men respond to that, and strive to forget themselves, and give themselves up to the great task to which God calls them, there comes an enlarging of every power of their manhood that makes life different to them for evermore. I have known a son who seemed to have nothing particular in him while he was shielded and sheltered under his father's care. But unexpectedly the father died, and on the son's shoulders came the burden of the home. What happened? Why, the boy became a man; he grew resolute and loyal and self-forgetful; his mother wondered at him, he seemed so changed, and the neighbours said they did not know he had it in him. But it was *always* there—that lustre of true manhood—only it took the touch of responsibility to light it up. Would you ever have known what great things were in Joseph, had he not been summoned to that high post in Egypt? Do you think that the wisdom, the patience, the splendid faith of Moses would have lighted up history if he had always dwelt with Pharaoh? Not Simon Peter alone has had full nets, when the call was obeyed 'Launch out into the deep.' I would therefore say to you, Accept responsibility. Be content that it should gather

round you as your life proceeds. There is a great deal more in you than you give yourself credit for, and this is God's way of lighting up the lustre.

Then, again, this is one of the chief offices of love. Love is the spark that kindles a thousand lamps. A love that is base may set a man a-fire, but a love that is heavenly sets a man a-shining. I often think of these great words of Bacon, in his matchless and immortal essay upon Friendship: 'For a crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk is but a tinkling cymbal, where there is not love.' A crowd is not company, yet every heart is beating in it: faces are but a gallery of pictures, yet every face has its own story on it: and talk is but a tinkling cymbal, yet the talk may be very witty and very clever—the lustre is there, but love has not lit it up. Does not a mother's love for her dear children make her more tender and patient and self-forgetting? Do you think that Wallace or Bruce would have been half the men they were, had they not been inspired with a passion of love for Scotland? And Dante tells us that but for his love for Beatrice, and the illuminating of his whole nature which it brought him, he would never have been moved to write these poems which are the wonder and the warning of the ages. That, then, is one of the great offices of love. It comes like a torch to light the lustre up. Hence the value, in the

expansion of human character, of the unutterable love of Jesus Christ.

And then this is one of the meanings of conversion—that old and noble and mismanaged word. Conversion is the lighting up of our lustre with the spark of God's Holy Spirit out of heaven. When a man is converted he does not get new brains: he does not get new senses or capacities; he is still surrounded by the old relationships, and he still moves in the self-same world. But I have heard men tell the story of their conversion, and they said, 'The stars seemed new to me, and even the sun shone differently.' And I have known men who had made everyone round them miserable, develop into true gentlemen when God met with them. Nor can anyone move among our Scottish peasantry, and see the wisdom and weight and power of certain characters, without perceiving how much it has meant for them that they should have known the living and true God. What has happened to them? Have they received new faculties? Nay, it is not that—the lustre was always there. But the light of all light has entered their circuit now, and the spark that is God's has kindled the spiritual candle: it is not a difference of added lustre; it is just that the lustre has been lighted up.

I have put old and familiar truths before you to-night; but I have tried to put them in an unfamiliar guise, for I am very anxious that our

younger people especially should escape the penalty of the unlighted lustre. You will escape it partly by playing your part in life, and taking up your burdens quietly and bravely. You will escape it by the ministry of human love of which this world, spite of all its evil, is so full. But you will escape it best—you will realize yourself—you will develop most steadily and normally and surely, if to-night you will open your heart's gate to God, and accept Christ Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. The lustre is there—you do not know yourself. You have no idea what is possible for you. Come, Light of men, light up the lustre—now! Even so come, Lord Jesus.

V

THE ALTAR AND THE TEMPLE

Ezra iii. 2, 6: 'Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak . . . and builded the altar of the God of Israel. . . . But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid.'

In the opening chapters of this Book of Ezra we are among the Jews who have come back from Babylon. God has restored the exiles to their country; and their feet stand in Jerusalem again. But the ravage of war and the silent attacks of time have played strange havoc with the beloved city. There are weeds in the streets of it; its walls are rent and gaping; its glorious temple is a mass of ruin. It was then that they set to work to restore Jerusalem. God breathed an enthusiasm upon the people. And it was then that they built the altar of the Lord, for the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid.

Such, then, is the setting of our text, and it carries three suggestions with it. First, It is good to begin building with an altar. Second, Build your altar till you can start your temple. Third, Have the temple clearly before you all the time.

First, then, it is good to begin building with an altar. There was a vast deal of confused ruin in Jerusalem. There was hardly a building but clamoured for repair. The city was like one of those cities in the tropics when the brilliant morning dawns on a scene of earthquake. No race that has ever been cradled in this world has had a more passionate attachment to their homes than had the Jews. Was it not their duty, then, to think of their wives and children, and to begin with the re-building of their homes? Few races that have risen to maturity have had keener commercial instincts than the Jews. Would it not have been natural that they should first turn to the market-places, and clear the accumulated rubbish from their bazaars? 'Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel.' Their homes which they loved so well must wait a little. Their walls and battlements and towers must be delayed. It was vitally necessary that all should be repaired, but something must take precedence of all. At the very start God must be recognized. In the forefront of everything He must have His place. Home, market, battlement, bazaar—all in good time; but *first* they builded the altar of the Lord.

Among all the parables of human life there are few more suggestive than the parable of

building. But our Jerusalem is not of stone and lime: the city which we are building is our character; and every thought we think, and every word we speak, and every sin we master, and every deed we do, is like a stone set in these mystical walls that are rising heavenwards through our threescore years. We never dream ourselves into a character. We never waken to find that we are strong. It is only in tales like the Arabian nights that the walls of the palace rise in a single hour. Through daily efforts too minute to chronicle, through infinitesimal victories and failures, by self-denials that win no recognition, by a growing passion to be faithful in the least—it is thus that human character is raised.

'And Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren builded the altar of the God of Israel.' There was enough to do to tax the strongest, and they began with the altar of the Lord. It is a great thing to know where to begin. A bad beginning is the worst of curses. I am absolutely hopeless of a young lady's afternoon if I know that she begins the morning with a novel. It is not through lack of effort that most men fail. It is through failing to see the relative worth of effort. It is through putting first what should have the twentieth place, and putting twentieth what should be first. Half of the weakness and of the worry of life does not

spring from sin but from disorder. A virtue is like a man in that respect—it is worse than useless out of its proper place.

This, then, is the first lesson of our text—it is good to begin building with an altar. It is wisest and noblest and most rational to begin with the recognition of the Lord. To realize that above our finite will there is the infinite will of the Almighty; to feel that around the purposes we form is the eternal purpose of a Sovereign God; to know that He girds us when we perceive it not, that He loves us even when we have despised Him, that He hath prepared our goings from of old, that He will never leave us nor forsake us,—is not that the secret of an arm that can endure, and of a heart that will not weary in the drought? Where do you start from? What is your ruling passion? Do you long to build a fortune or a name? It is a thousand times better to fall into line with Jeshua and begin by building an altar to the Lord. Begin every day by recognising God. Begin every meal by recognising God. Before every book you read and every visit you pay, erect in a flash of thought your unseen altar. Dear are our homes, but we dare not put them first. Dear is our work, dear are our books and comrades. But clear as a trumpet across the sound of breakers comes the word of Jesus, 'Seek ye *first* the kingdom.'

The second lesson of our text is this, Build your altar till you can start your temple.

It was impossible for these returned exiles to start the building of their temple right away. That was a task which called for preparation; there must be hewing of cedars and shaping of stones for that. It might be weeks—it would probably be months—before the ground could be cleared on which to found their temple. What did they do then, these heroes of the Covenant? Did they sit in the shade and prattle about Babylon? 'And Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren builded the altar of the God of Israel.' It was not possible yet to build the temple, but at least it was possible to build the altar. They could not accomplish all that they hoped to do, but there was something which they *could* do, and they did it. Such was the spirit of this noble people to whom were committed the oracles of God.

Now, if our life means anything for us, it must be rich in dreams which we cannot realize. We have been redeemed from Babylon to build our temple, but the cedars wherewith to build it still wave on Lebanon. A life is very valueless and poor if it can grasp and hold all for which it craves. When a man can gain all that he struggles for, the gain has no heart-beat of the infinite within it. There is such a thing as immediate success which

in the sight of God is deadly and damning failure. There is such a thing as an instant satisfaction which is more fatal to the soul than any sin. It is the heart which hungers that is the blessed heart. It is the soul which is haunted with the infinite. It is the seeing of visions and the dreaming of dreams that are the marks of Messianic times.

But build your altar till you start your temple. That is the lesson of these Jewish heroes. Resist the temptation to do nothing at all because you cannot do all that you would wish to do.

> 'When obstacles and trials seem like prison walls to be,
> I do the little I can do, and leave the rest to Thee.'

A visionary dreams his dreams and builds his airy palaces; and they are beautiful, with the sunlight glancing and flashing on every minaret. And then he folds his arms—the visionary—and does nothing; and the poor world goes sinning and sorrowing on. But the Christian has dreams as bright as any visionary's, for he believes in a regenerated world, but he does not fold his arms and let the world sin on; he sets to work in the very lowliest service. He says, I cannot realise my temple, but please God, I shall erect my altar. Did you ever hear of a mother refusing to sing to her children because she had not been trained by

the best masters? If she cannot sing to them, at least she can croon to them, and she will do it every morning because she loves them so. So when a man loves God in Jesus Christ, and has felt the comradeship of mankind in joy and pain, he cannot tarry till his notes are perfect; he starts at once with a very broken melody. You cannot pray as you know you ought to pray: do you make that a reason for not praying at all? You cannot give the Christmas presents you would like to give: are you therefore not going to give any? You cannot do great services for Christ, you cannot make the greatest sacrifices: are you therefore doing nothing at all? Do what you can. Begin your altar now. Do not waste one hour waiting for the temple. Christ never said, She hath done mighty things; Christ's praise was, 'She hath done what she could.'

First, then, it is good to begin building with an altar. Second, build your altar till you can start your temple. Thirdly, and in a word, have the temple clearly before you all the time.

When Jeshua and his brethren built the altar, they never thought of it as a final act. They did not regard it as the temple's substitute, constructed at a much easier rate. It was rather the first instalment of the whole, the earnest of what

was yet to be; the sacrament of wall and court and holy place, where the covenant-God was to reveal His glory. The fact is—it will occur to you at once—that but for the temple there would have been no altar. They would never have started to rear the stones of sacrifice, but in the bright hope of the House that was to be. They spake of the temple as the altar rose. They were cheered in their altar-building by the temple. They toiled and wrought, and sang their responsive hymns, and the source of all energy was the temple yet unbuilt. I have no doubt their enemies made a jest of them. They could not understand that inspiration. It seemed so useless to build a heap of stones, when the city was like a heap of stones already—they did not know that as every tier was laid, it was laid in the faith of a temple yet to be. That was the source of Israel's enthusiasm. *That* was why they sang so brightly at their toil. To the eye of sense there was but an altar there; but the builders had the temple before them all the time.

It is in a spirit such as that that everything worth doing must be done. The source of all enthusiasm and of all earnestness lies in a hope which is powerful to transfigure. When Columbus, having overcome tremendous difficulties, was making his way to the shore of unknown

America, you all remember—you read it in your school books—how one morning there was seaweed round the prow. The sailors were mutinous: it brought no message to them; it was only a bed of seaweed and no more. But to their gallant leader it was a sign from God, and he saw the crowning of all his hopes within it. It takes the infinite, says Robert Browning, to brush a hair's-breadth off the dust of the actual. It takes the vision of the perfect temple if we are to build well the humblest altar. It takes the assurance that striving shall not be vain, and the certainty that ideals shall yet be realised, if we are to toil cheerfully and bravely at the task that is given to us to-day.

It is at that point (with an emphasis which is divine), that the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaims its message. For the golden age of Christ is on ahead of us, and the best, for the follower of the Lord, is still to be. We are not striving for impossible ideals. We are not the children of delusive hopes. There is yet to be a regenerated world where the child shall lay his hand upon the serpent's lair. Everything we ever strove for shall be ours. Every effort we ever made shall there be crowned. Our very failures shall welcome us in heaven with a new name written across their brow. Build, then,

thine altar: the stones are at thy feet. Care not how poor it be, how mean it look. It is the earnest of a glorious temple, which in the fulness of God's time shall surely rise.

VI

THE DISLIKE OF THE COMMONPLACE

2 Kings v. 11, 12: 'But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.' 'Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage.'

THE irritation of Naaman is so natural that it hardly requires any words of explanation. We recognize in a moment what vexed him so, just because we have often been so vexed ourselves. Naaman expected a striking and startling cure. He knew how the Syrian magicians would conduct themselves. They would come forth in procession, muttering their incantations, and moving their hands in mysterious fashion over the sufferer. Something of this kind, no doubt, Naaman was expecting when he rode up in state to Elisha's door. Then came Elisha's message, Go and wash in Jordan. Go and do something that any man could do. There was none of the drama here that Naaman expected—it was a command that any slave could execute. And it was all so

commonplace—so ordinary—so utterly lacking in dramatic interest, that Naaman was intensely irritated.

To-night, then, following the suggestion of our text, I wish to speak for a little on the commonplace; and I shall cast what I have to say into this shape: First, the dislike of the commonplace is well-nigh universal. Second, there are few things more dangerous than this dislike.

First, then, on the widespread irritation at the commonplace, so clearly manifested in the case of Naaman. I think I need hardly remind you of another Bible story where the same intense dislike makes itself manifest. 'Is not this the carpenter's son? Do we not know His brothers?' It was with such words that the Jews discredited Jesus. Like Naaman they were intensely irritated at the commonplaceness of this Messiah's advent. It was a prevalent belief of the Jews that the second Adam would come in full-grown manhood like the first. They had the convenient habit which we all possess of forgetting the prophecies they wanted to forget. Suddenly, in some epiphany of glory, perhaps from the secret of the Temple, Christ would appear. They were looking for some spectacular performance, as Naaman was when he came posting to Elisha. Then Christ was born in a little hillside village, and He was rocked in His cradle by His village mother, and

He wrought with His father who was the village-carpenter, and He played with His comrades in the village streets—and it was all so commonplace to unobservant eyes—so untouched with a single gleam of scenic splendour, that the Jews, like Naaman, were very angry, and went away from Christ Jesus in a rage.

But to come nearer home and think of ourselves—are we not all prone to the same irritation? Think for example of how we regard our newspapers. A man takes up his paper with a feeling of expectancy; he rarely lays it down without some disappointment. We say, There is nothing in the newspaper this morning—nothing—and so we throw it down. What we really mean is that there is nothing startling, nothing to thrill and hold us by its tragedy. For every morning there is the record of birth in it—the echoing music of new-created life, and every morning there is the record of death in it, with its untold sorrow and unbidden tears; and the teeming and busy life of all the world is in it, and the coming of the kingdom for those who have eyes to see; yet day after day, through a whole summer-time, we throw down the paper and say there is nothing in it. Is that faint vexation not akin to Naaman's when he was bidden by Elisha to go and wash in Jordan? Does it not indicate that it is very hard to realize the value of the ordinary? The fact is we are half-savage at

the heart yet, and have never lost the savage delight in glaring colours. It is only in heaven, where we shall all be saints, that we shall never weary of the robes of white.

I cannot help thinking, too, that much of men's world-weariness—much of the disappointment that unfolding life brings with it—is connected by very real yet subtle ties, with this deep-seated vexation at the commonplace. When we are young we all dream heroic dreams. We are all going to be soldiers or sea-captains. Heaven lies about us in our infancy, and in the depths of that heaven we all descry the angels. We start from childhood, as Naaman did from Syria, not knowing anything but seeing glorious visions; and we have all pictured in our schoolboy years what is going to happen when we meet Elisha. Then we, too, enter our land of promise—we come to the borders of our manhood and our womanhood—we approach the threshold we have so often dreamed of in those days of the heroes when we were little children; but the pageantry we looked for and the glory we foresaw do not meet us any more than they met Naaman: like Naaman we are just bidden go and wash in Jordan. Our joys have nothing remarkable about them—they are just the joys of a thousand other homes. There is nothing spectacular about our sorrows—we can point to a score of hearts which have been torn like ours. We are not such

geniuses as we once thought we were—matched with the great world we come to find our level—life is more ordinary, and far more commonplace, than we ever dreamed of in the golden morning. So springs one disappointment of maturity; so springs the temptation to innumerable sins. It almost seems as if the promise of life had cheated us—life has evolved so differently from our expectation. How many men turn away in a rage from life's plain duties not because they are difficult, but because they are dull! How many avoid the path where the cross lies, who would tread it to-morrow if there were only some glamour there! It may be hard to follow the ark into the deeps of Jordan. Perhaps it is harder to wash in Jordan seven times.

And in our Christian experience are we not also like Naaman, and have we not known something of Naaman's disappointment? I think that many men come to Jesus Christ as this commander of Syria came to the prophet Elisha. We come because we need Him just as Naaman did. We come because the leprosy of sin is on us. And we have heard such tidings of this mighty Saviour, and of His power to redeem and save and sanctify, that we come all eager with glorious expectations. God forbid that I should say that these hopes are disappointed. He *is* able to save even to the uttermost. He is here to-night to redeem us and

to cleanse us. He is a thousand times more willing to cure us of our leprosy than Elisha was to cure that curse of Naaman. But when we come and when we cannot see Him, when we only hear a voice that bids us wash, when instead of swift miracle there is only plain command, when instead of great deeds there is dull and dreary service, have not men been moved even against Jesus with the very feeling which animated Naaman? You must resist that feeling. You must fight it down. You must realise the glory of the ordinary. To turn away from Elisha in a rage was a very poor and pitiable thing. But to turn away from Christ Jesus in a rage is the one fatal act of a man's life.

So I am led naturally to our second head—there are few things more dangerous than this dislike. Let me just indicate to you three reasons that make it so perilous to nurse this irritation.

First, then, the commonplace is the warp and woof of life. It is the material out of which our days are made. Take yesterday—think how you spent it from morning till evening star, and you have the record of a thousand ordinary things. Even to the greatest, great moments come but rarely. Perhaps to you and me they never come at all. If we ever had one tumultuous moment of sweet joy, if we ever had one agonizing hour of sorrow, it will stand out for us, like the top

of an Alp above the mist, through the summers and shadows of a score of years. The very fact that we remember it so vividly shows how rare these experiences are. But the fabric of our common days is commonplace. We waken, we eat, we work, we pray, we sleep. We go through the dull routine of daily duty: we have our little and undistinguished share of trial. It was a thousand things like these that made up yesterday, and a thousand yesterdays make up our life. One of our modern novelists says a wise thing about greatness—that sadly distorted and mismanaged word. Greatness, he says, is to take the common things of life, and to walk among them truly. No matter how commonplace your life is it may be greatly lived, if you will only let the light of God flash on the strands of it. And no matter how stirring your life be it shall be a failure, if you have never been wakened to the glory of the usual. There is no happiness like the old and common happiness—sunshine and love and duty and the laughter of children. Only a fool would think that yacht or motor-car could be laid in the balance with these abiding things. There are no duties that so enrich us as dull duties. There is nothing like a thorn in the flesh for sanctifying. And all this strength, and peace, and quiet advance into the depth and dignity of manhood, is squandered and lost by the man who

frets, like Naaman, when the God of his destiny bids him wash in Jordan.

Then the commonplace is God's preparation for the great. It prepares us to meet great hours when they come. Simple obedience to a very plain command for us as for Naaman is the path to glorious hours. What did our Lord mean in that parable we read to-night, when He made the master say, 'Be thou ruler of ten cities?' What did He mean when He said, 'Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant—Take from him the pound and give it to him that hath ten?' He meant that the capacity for royal government, the power to rise to great calls and be a king, was rooted in the brave and faithful handling of a commonplace and ordinary pound. The pound was the preparation for the palace. In this strange world I think it is always so. Trace back the failure that makes all the city talk, and you will find its roots in ill-regulated years. But get at the secret of the man who has had great hours, who has handled his dramatic moments well, who has borne the test of fiery temptation, who has been brave and admirable in some crushing loss, and at the back of it all you will find a gallant story of unrecorded and immemorial years. All a man's hope for a radiant to-morrow lies in the heart of his commonplace to-day. If you cannot be faithful now when all is dreary, there is little hope

of any victory then. And that is why a man throws away his chances and forfeits his future and plays traitor to to-morrow, when from the commonplace calls and crosses of to-day, he turns away like Naaman in a rage.

Then think how Christ insists upon the commonplace: and we all wish, do we not, to follow Him? The more I study Christ's life the more I am impressed by the value that He set upon the ordinary. He took a common lily that grew in tens of thousands, and He said of it, 'Not even Solomon in all his glory.' He took a commonplace child—not over-clean perhaps, but with such eyes!—and said of it, 'Of such is the kingdom of God.' For Christ, there was a whole universe within the mustard seed. For Christ, there was a revelation in the sparrows. For Christ, there was a wealth of meaning in a village. For Christ, in a piece of broken bread there was a sacrament. Whatever Naaman did, it is clear that Jesus of Nazareth never turned away from the commonplace in a rage. Now will you try to follow in His steps? It will make such a difference to you if you will. Every day will be brighter, every task break into music, every commonplace burden have a gleam of heaven on it, if instead of fretting like Naaman we say, Yes, Lord, because Thou biddest me, I shall go and wash in Jordan seven times.

VII

THE GRACE OF RECEPTIVITY

1 Cor. iv. 7: 'What hast thou that thou didst not receive?'

THE church at Corinth, like the other apostolic churches, betrays its own peculiar weaknesses. A spirit of pride and of arrogant self-assertion had appeared in it, and as always happens in a church or congregation, such pride was speedily followed by contention. It is such a spirit that Paul is combating in this so wise and so affectionate letter. It is to men who were prone to be puffed up (as the word is) that he says, What have ye that ye did not receive? For he knew out of his own experience, that could he once burn that truth into their hearts, there would be little fear of the flourishing of pride.

Circumstances are very different to-day from what they were in that little church of Corinth; our outlook is different, our insight is far deeper, we are served heirs of the Christian wealth of all the centuries: yet I question if ever there was a time when men had more need of listening to this text, 'What have ye that ye did not receive?'

'Receptiveness,' George Eliot says somewhere, 'is a noble and massive virtue.' And however eminent this age may be, however many the crowns upon its brow, I hardly think its warmest champion would maintain that it was noted for its receptivity. I shall name two tendencies which are characteristic of this present time, and which make it hard to write our text upon our banner.

First, then, this is an inventive age. It is an age of marvellous invention and discovery. With the exception of the latter half of the fifteenth century it is unsurpassed in the long history of the world. Think of our steamships, think of our railways: think of our telephones and wireless telegraphs: think of our new conceptions of nature, and of our new comprehension of the past, if you would find the spirit of the age. Into that spirit we are all baptised. In every one of us, perhaps quite unconsciously, there is a touch of the inventor's and the discoverer's temper. That is to say we are bred in the idea that all that is best and highest and most noble has to be won by human search and seeking. Does that then make us arrogant? Not so. Does it puff us up like the poor church at Corinth? Not so. But it makes it hard for us to realise that we do not find the best—the best finds us. It makes it hard to remember that the things which count are after all not wages but are gifts. We think we discover God—we find

Him out—and we breathe the spirit of the age in thinking that; but what we forget is that ere we discover God, God in His mercy has discovered us. What have we that we have not accomplished? What have we that we have not toiled for? There would be something in *that* very congenial to every heart in this audience to-night. But the side of things with which we are out of touch, thanks to the inventive spirit of the age, is 'what have we that we did not receive.'

Then this is a critical age. Every one of us is well aware of that. We have only to open our weekly reviews and magazines, or to scan our publishers' announcements, to find how in the world of literature this is emphatically a day of criticism. It is not so much a day of books as a day of books about books. It is the age, too, of the higher criticism, when every line of Scripture is dissected, when every document is microscopically handled, and when every doctrine is thrown into the crucible. Now I do not mention that fact just to deplore it. The man who deplores his age will never help it much. God has His critical and His constructive periods, and He has made everything beautiful in its time. But I mention it because all of us, more or less, are touched with the critical spirit of the day, and the critical spirit even at its noblest is very far away from receptivity. It is one thing to weigh

and analyse: it is another thing simply to receive. When we are accustomed to get at truth by fine dissection, it is not easy to regard it as a gift. So springs the danger of being very blind to-day to the truth here emphasised by Paul.

Now I wish to apply the text in different ways, and first let us think for a moment of the world of nature. We have been rejoicing lately in the first signs of spring; everywhere the catkins are whitening on the willows; the song of the birds is growing richer and fuller and is heaven's prophetic music of the summer. In wood and field and hedgebank there are dim signs of mysterious resurrection; not far from any one of us is the true garden where the Lord is walking in the cool of the day. Ah! how we vex ourselves with the deep problems of how this world came to be created! How we fight the battle of the six days again: how we read and re-read our books on evolution—until sometimes the glory which is Spring, and the wealth and joy and sunshine which are Summer, pass by us, and give us not one word of benediction, we are so restless with our questionings. Such questionings are right and they are noble. They are part of the penalty we pay for knowledge. I do not belittle them, but I say that back of them all there is a great fact that none can ever question—I am pleading for receptivity to-night. However the world was created

or evolved, here it is, a glad and glorious gift. We did not fashion one blade of grass in it, the labours of our hands were never asked; we were born and opened our eyes and it was there: some one had given it to us as a gift. We invent the telegraph, we do not invent the Spring. We discover the power of steam, but not the dawn. These things find us, they are given freely; they come to us in all their glory, gratis: and I believe that the keenest intellect will fail to grasp the true value of this great creation, unless there come seasons when it can let alone, and practise the great grace of receptivity. What have ye that ye did not receive? Loch, mountain, moor, sunset and evening star. The next time that you walk abroad, try to think of creation as a gift.

Think again of our capacities and faculties. In that searching parable which we call the parable of the talents there is one word which we are apt to overlook. We lay full emphasis upon the trading with the talents, but we neglect that word at the beginning—gave. 'Unto one he *gave* five talents, to another two, and to another one'—the greatest endowments, and the least, were gifts—and our Lord was so consummately careful of His words and chose them with such exquisite exactitude, that I feel there was a depth of meaning to His mind in the thought that the talents were not won but given. Was it by your toil—the labour of

your hands—that your brain acquired its marvellous power of thinking? Was it your skill that built the picture-gallery which we call so lightly the imagination? Whence did our eye get its wonderful power of seeing, our ear of hearing or our hand of touching? Did we toil for these things, and win them by hard-task work, and grope with pain till we had reached their secret?—unto one he *gave* five talents, to another two. If God has denied the delightful gift of beauty, all Paris and London are powerless to produce it. If God has not given the boon of a sweet voice, the training of twenty years will not create it. We talk of self-reliance and self-culture, and with honest pride we speak of self-made men: but back of all our trading with the talents there are the talents themselves, and these are given before we ever ask them. The possibility of all we do, lies not in what we do but in what we get. Our gifts are the only basis of our gains. It is well sometimes that we should all be still, and shut our books and lay aside our microscopes, and say to ourselves in secret meditation, What have we that we did not receive?

Nor can we forget that thanks to the increasing knowledge of the centuries, there are deeper meanings in the text for us, than were perceived by Paul. It is one mark, indeed, of all inspired writing that it expands with the expanding experience of time, and that it breaks con-

tinuously into larger meaning under the touch of growing thought and life. For what is heredity —that strange and awful fact—but the expansion by science of this inspired word? What motto for the text-books of heredity could match this motto, 'What have ye that ye did not receive?' Whence comes the bent and bias of my nature? Why am I tempted to this and not to that? Whence is it that certain virtues are so easy to me, and others so incredibly hard? The basis of all my strength and all my weakness, of all battle with, of all I hope to be,—the basis of it is the unsought-for gift of the generations who have passed and died. I hear it sometimes said when a man dies, 'So-and-so has left practically nothing.' But the poorest man leaves practically everything, for in the strictest of all senses he bequeaths himself. When I think, then, how my battle and my hope, my strength, my weakness, my very joy and sorrow,—when I think how all this in its germ has come to me from the hope and the love and the failures of my ancestry, then dimly do I perceive the depths of meaning in the words that came with such rebuke to Corinth: What have ye that ye did not receive?

Then lastly—and it would ill become me to close without bringing you a little nearer Christ—I want you to apply our text to the great gospel of the love of God. All love is a gift; you cannot

compel or force it; it is only love when it is freely given: and if that is true of the love of man and woman it must be true of the love of God to me. Now open your New Testament again. Did this ever strike you? Did you ever notice it? I say that the New Testament throbs and thrills with the glad thought that the gospel is a gift. 'Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters.' 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' 'If any man will open the door.' 'Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.' This was the good news that thrilled the world after the baffled search of Greece and Rome—that love and deathless hope and power and liberty were to be taken as a free gift from heaven.

Therefore would I say to all here to-night who are longing and striving and toiling for the best: all that is best does not begin in striving; it comes as a gift from God and must be taken. Spring is a gift, and Summer is a gift, and song and music and genius and love: why should God alter when it comes to Jesus, and give Him only to our weary toil? You receive the sunshine and you receive the melody, I ask you is it not rational that you receive Christ Jesus? Therefore I plead with you just to be still, to open your hearts to the Lord and let Him in. Take as a gift what you have struggled for: that is God's simple and amazing way.

VIII

'THE GLORIOUS LAMP OF HEAVEN'

Ps. lxxxiv. 11: 'The Lord God is a sun.'

A WEEK or two ago, when we were all looking with interest towards the eclipse of the moon, I took up again a fascinating volume which I doubt not many of you have read. The volume I refer to is the 'Story of the Heavens' written by Sir Robert Ball; and Sir Robert Ball is not only an astronomer who holds high and honourable rank among men of science, he is also a writer of pure and lucid English. Reading that volume I was deeply impressed by all that Sir Robert had to tell about the moon; but I think that I was arrested still more powerfully by the strange and wonderful story of the sun. Time and again I found myself laying down the book overpowered by the thought that the Lord God is a sun. The kinship between that creature and its great Creator shone out from the pages in unexpected radiance. And so to-night I have taken this poet's text, and I shall try, from one or two of the aspects thus suggested, to use it so as to illumine our thought of God.

First, then, I was struck by the results that flowed from the discovery of the right place of the sun. Astronomy is one of the oldest of the sciences; it has its roots far back in prehistoric times; and not a few very remarkable discoveries must have been made when the race was in its childhood. Especially in the East, where the stars burn and glitter as with the intensity of some great moral purpose, had students outwatched the lonely night in gazing, and linked the stars with the destinies of men. But always, in the very centre of their system, there was poised this earth on which we live. This was the focus, this was the midmost point, this was the pivot of the whole machine; and till the earth was displaced from her usurped centrality, and cast into some outer circle of the system, progress was barred, true knowledge was impossible, and a thousand facts remained inexplicable. I need hardly remind you that it was Copernicus who was the first to solve this problem of the centre. It was he who proved that the sun and not the earth is the true centre of our solar system. And how much we owe to that wonderful discovery — how many problems it has solved, how many truths suggested —all that could be most eloquently told by those who have given their lifetime to the science.

Now it seems to me that the progress of our life is not unlike that progress of astronomy. We all

begin in one way or another by making this earth on which we dwell, the centre. The first man is of the earth earthy: 'first, that which is natural,' says the apostle. Our hopes, our dreams, our joys and our ambitions cluster and circle round this present world. The strange thing is that while *this* remains the centre, for us as for the astronomer much is dark. A thousand problems baffle our inquiry and a thousand questions are answered by a cry. What is the meaning of suffering or pain? Why are so many faces drawn in agony? Why are those who are too gentle to harm a living creature bowed down for years in intolerable anguish? These questions—and a score of problems as insistent — rise up to meet us and are unanswerable, so long as this life, this earth, this present world remains the centre of the moral system. But the day comes—and it comes to every man—when he has his chance of being a Copernicus. He has his choice of making the great refusal or of making the grandest of all grand discoveries, for the greatest discovery a man can make is that God is the centre of the system. What is man's chief end? asks our noble and strong old catechism—it is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever. It is to realise that in the centre does not stand the world; but the love and the wisdom and the will of the Almighty. And when once, through whatever pain and discipline, a man

has discovered that fact about his universe, he is no longer crying in the night. He sees a meaning now where there was none before. He believes in the melody of minor chords. Problems are eased, dark facts can now be faced; there is light in the gloom and hope of a tearless morn—all this in some measure every man has known who has truly striven to make God the centre.

The next fact that impressed me as I read was how beneficent is the power of the sun, and yet from what a vast distance it is exercised.

I question if the strongest language could exaggerate the indebtedness of the earth to the great luminary. We owe so much to it, and we are so dependent on it for every thought we think and every breath we draw, that no one can be much surprised at sun-worship. Without the sun our corn would never ripen, we should have no harvest in our autumn fields. Without the sun no rose would ever blush, no blade of grass would be green in any meadow, no mantle of royal purple would be cast over the passion-flower at the gate. Without the sun there would be no dew at daybreak, no glory of clouds, never one shower of rain. Without the sun no breeze would ever visit us, no sail would ever be filled upon the sea. What lights our coal? The power of the sun. What drives our engines? The power of the sun. What alone makes physical life a possibility to the

millions of the human race? There is a very literal sense in which it is true that in the sun we live and move and have our being. Yet the sun is an extraordinary distance from the earth—the sun is ninety-two million miles away. Can you conceive that distance? Can you grasp it? How many days do you think would be required to count it? Yet from *that* distance, vast beyond imagining, there acts and operates this great yet gentle power, mighty enough to make all the tropics burn, yet delicate enough to paint the tiniest weed.

Now I am sure that most of us here this evening have been oppressed at times by the thought of a distant God. Like Job we have looked to the right hand and He was not there, and to the left, and have seen nothing of His form. Where is the heaven of heavens wherein God dwells? Where is the Holy of Holies where He has His throne? Is it not far away, in the clear and unsullied light, above the smoke and stir of this dim spot? Until under the weight of thoughts like these the distance of the Almighty Father chills us, and we cannot pray with realizing power nor can we walk with realizing faith. Tempted and tried thus let us recall our text: The Lord God is a shield—He is a sun. Wherever His throne be, in distances illimitable, shall He be outmatched in power by His creature? If the orb

of heaven can have his being ninety million miles away, and yet can fall with such power as to heat a continent, and with such exquisite nicety as to make the rosebud redden, why should it seem a thing incredible to you that the Creator who fashioned that glorious lamp, should dwell apart immeasurably far, yet touch and turn and bless and save humanity? He taketh up the isles as a very little thing—the nations before Him are as nothing. Yet He knoweth the way that I take; He understands my thought; He will not quench the flax nor break the reed. Powerful yet very far away; thoughtful and tender, though hidden in the distance; yes, David, we thank thee for that word, The Lord God is a sun.

Once more I was greatly impressed by this, that without the atmosphere the sun could never bless us. Without the envelope of closely clinging air that engirdles this globe like some diaphanous garment, the heat of the sun and all the light of it would fall quite ineffectually on the earth. When you climb a mountain you get nearer the sun; would you not naturally think that it ought to get hotter there? As a matter of fact it gets colder as we rise till we reach the peaks that are robed with perpetual snow. The reason is that we are piercing through that air which wraps and enwraps this little earth of ours. It is the atmosphere which mediates the sun; which catches and

stores and distributes the heat. Were there no air, but only empty space, then the greenest valley would be like Mont Blanc, and the tropics would be ice-bound in a perpetual winter, though the sun in itself were as fiery-hot as ever.

May I not use that mystery of nature to illuminate a kindred mystery of grace? It is one of the ways of God in all His workings to grant His blessings through an intermediary. You say that the sun is the source of heat and light; why then should anything be intruded between earth and sun? I can only answer, So the Creator works—without that mediating element all is lost. You say that God is the source of love and blessing; why should anything intervene betwixt God and man? I can only answer that it is the way of heaven to grant its richest blessing through a mediator. How often men and women have said to me, 'I do not feel any need of Christ or Calvary. I believe in God, I reverence and worship God; but the sacrifice and the atonement just confuse me. They appear to be outside of me altogether; I cannot make them real to my heart.' But to me it seems that through every sphere of God's activity runs the great principle of mediation; and to me the presence of Christ is like the air, making available for my need the love of God. Remove the atmosphere and the sun will still shine in heaven. Take away Jesus and God will still

be love. Banish the air, and the sun will not lose its heat. Banish the Christ, and God will not lose His power. But with the air gone, the glory of the sun will never so fall as to bless our little world, and with Jesus banished, the mercy and love of God may stream on other realms but not on ours. Christ is the mediator of the better covenant. He stands—the vital breath—'twixt God and us. Through Him the sunshine of heaven's love can reach us, and in the rays of that sunshine we are blessed.

Then lastly, and in a word, when the sun is invisible we still see its reflected light; for we all know that the light which gilds the moon, and which gives such a lustre of brilliance to the planets, is not the light of their own burning hearts but the light of the sun which to our eyes has set. Go out these March evenings and look at the western sky where Venus is glowing in her unequalled splendour—then remember that but for the sunshine which is gone from us, there would be no such jewel in the ear of night. I preached some little time ago on that text of the apostle, What have ye that ye did not receive? but the Evening Star—had we but ears to hear it—is preaching that text in the heavens every night. Now in the spiritual world are there not also times when the sun seems to have set? There is such evil in the state and such quarrelling in the church,

that men are tempted to cry, There is no God. In such hours, urgent and paramount becomes the duty of personal religion. In such hours Christian character is called for, with an appeal that no other time can match. For the Lord God is a sun, and when He seems to sink out of the national or ecclesiastical horizon, then lives that still glow with His light amid the dark are the unanswerable argument for Him.

IX

THE SEVERITY OF CHRIST

We speak a great deal, and we never can speak too much, of the tenderness of our Lord and Saviour. We may be sure that the gaze of the centuries has not been at fault when it has singled out the gentleness of Christ. One of the most marked changes which the gospel has wrought in Christendom is the softening and ameliorating of its life; and if all this has been as it were the outflow of the life and character of Jesus Christ, we feel how real His tenderness must have been. The prophet was not prophesying vainly when he said 'He would grow up before Him as a tender plant.' Men learned, as they watched Christ in His daily intercourse, how true it was that a bruised reed He would not break.

But if the tenderness of Christ be matchless, we must not forget that there is another side. There is a certain severity in the Man of Nazareth that immediately arrests the onlooker. A recent critic, in a very masterly study, has drawn attention to the severity of Shakespeare. He has pointed

out that spite of his infinite tolerance, there is a certain sternness deep down in Shakespeare's heart. Now for me Jesus of Nazareth stands alone. I would not even suggest comparisons with Shakespeare. Still, spite of His infinite gentleness this too is true: there is a certain sternness in the heart of Jesus. There must have been many people who being in Jesus' company, would go away saying, 'Thou art an austere man.' And I have often thought that many of the likenesses of Christ, which have been drawn by the great artists of all ages, have failed because the love they sought to picture had little in it of this high austerity.

Of course we shall not think that Christ's severity was in any way antagonistic to His gentleness. There were no antagonisms in that perfect character. The French have a proverb which says, 'There is nothing so tender as the austere man,' and many of the shining saints of the Old Testament, and many of the sternest men whom we have known, give us our warrant for holding that proverb true. We always think of John Knox as severe; yet his weightiest biographer, Dr Hume Brown, is at pains to show us his tender and genial heart. It may be that if we are only kind we are not even kind; there are hours when it is cruel to be gentle. When I speak, then, of the severity of Christ I speak of

nothing alien to His gentleness. It is the shadows which heighten the beauty of the hills. It is death which deepens the mystery of life. And the noble severity of Christ our Saviour, falling athwart His tenderness and pity, give them that depth and dignity and power and permanence which have achieved the regeneration of mankind.

> 'Feeble and false the brightest flame
> By thoughts severe unfed;
> Book-love ne'er served when trial came,
> Nor gifts where faith was dead.'

It is then of this severity of Jesus that I desire to say a few plain words this evening. I ask you to follow me while I seek to trace it, through the various activities of His life.

First then I turn to the moral standards of Christ, to that which scholars denote by the name Christian ethics; and immediately I am arrested, yes, even startled, by the note of severity which I catch there. 'If thy right hand offend thee cut it off': 'If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.' Was ever moral programme so stern as that? Again, 'If any man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be My

disciple; and whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.' We have read these words so often, that they have well-nigh lost their meaning for the church; but I tell you that the men who heard them first, as they fell from the lips of the Teacher whom they followed, were aghast at the moral severity of Christ. It was so different from all they had ever learned. It was so diverse from the light spirit of antiquity. It demanded so much of them, called them to such self-sacrifice, made life so serious, so grave, so awful—they had never listened to teaching just like this. They learned that the whole world was not to be valued, if laid in the balance with one human soul. They learned that any sacrifice was small, to win the liberty of true discipleship. And if the world has been renovated by the Christian ethic, and if the desert has rejoiced and blossomed as the rose, there has been more than gentleness at work, there has been the severity of Jesus.

Once more, we see this same mark of severity, when Jesus is dealing with inquirers. And if I am speaking to any here this evening who are engaged in evangelistic work, I ask them very carefully to notice this. We must all have been struck by the readiness of Jesus in reaching the hearts of those who came inquiring. It is then, I think, above all other times that we feel how

fully He knew what was in man. There is no formula that is repeated every time. There is no dealing with inquirers in classes or in companies. The individual soul, in its yearning after God, was far too mysterious to sanction that. There were never two men who came to Jesus Christ who were treated exactly in the same way. If they were fearful, they met with sweet encouragement. If they were doubtful, some word of light was uttered. Sometimes the arrow was extracted instantly; at other times the arrow was driven deeper. None could be gentler or kinder than the Saviour; none could be more terribly severe.

Take for example the case of Nicodemus—the ruler of the Jews who came to Christ by night. 'Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God'—there is a touch of flattery, and just a suggestion of patronage, in that first greeting of the Jewish doctor. He wanted a few lessons from the Master on this new kingdom which He had begun to preach. Then swiftly and sharply Jesus turns upon him: 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom.' And when Nicodemus is staggered at the answer, when he gropes in the darkness not knowing what it means, Christ as it were completes his overthrow, 'Art thou a master in Israel and understandest not these things?' It was severe handling, but it was infinitely kind. It arrested, penetrated, broke this

Pharisee. It shattered his little code into a thousand fragments, and brought him down helpless to the feet of God. And in after years, when the wounds were healed again, and when Nicodemus was a rejoicing Christian, he knew that Christ had never been more loving than on that night when He seemed most severe.

Or we might think of those men who came to Christ in a kind of fitful and superficial enthusiasm. Christ loved enthusiasm when it was whole-hearted, but He was always severe with the superficial kind. 'Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever thou goest,' said one; and his face was beaming, I have not a doubt of it. And if Jesus had been anything less than Jesus, I think He would have said, 'I give you a thousand welcomes.' For there are times, in all lives which are a battle, when every heart seems to be alienated, and in such times there is exquisite relief in the loyalty of even a shallow soul. 'Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest;' and did Jesus say to him, I welcome thee? 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head.' And another said, 'Lord, I will follow Thee; but first let me go and say farewell at home'; and the answer of Jesus, about no man and the plough, is one of the sternest words the world has ever heard. Our Lord was never anxious about quantity: our Lord was

always anxious about quality. It was a high and arduous and noble thing to serve Him; let a man count the cost ere he signed on. Hence the severity which Christ showed to new-comers who were superficial, sentimental, fickle. It was the severity of heavenly pity. It was the rich severity of truth.

Again there is Christ's severity in judgment; I desire to say a word on that, for I am sure there are not a few who are perplexed, as they read and meditate on the gospel story, with the denunciations of the Saviour. We know that a bruised reed He would not break—then why the 'woe on you, ye scribes and Pharisees'? He would not strive nor cry nor lift up His voice in the streets—then why those words to Herod—'Go tell that fox'? It seems to jar so harshly, does it not, on our conception of a meek and lowly Saviour. It has often seemed to me that such judgments were a part of Jesus' cross. I think it pained and wounded Him to scourge the Pharisees, as much as to have the nails piercing His hands. There are men who delight in passing severe judgments. It is a kind of refuge from their own unworthiness. But Jesus in judging had not a tinge of pleasure; it was part of the burden and sorrow of His cross. It was inevitable, if men were to know the right, that sternly and straight the wrong should be condemned. You must clear away the ruins if you

would found the palace. You must punish the traitors if you would save the kingdom. And it was because scribes and Pharisees were really traitors, to God and to light and to spiritual liberty, that Christ scourged them with a condemnation that was unutterably and appallingly severe. It was not because He hated them that He judged them. It was because He loved the lost sheep of the house of Israel. There was pity for God's children who had been misled, in every word that cut like a sharp sword. And if to-day we breathe a larger air, if the shackles of the Pharisee are rotted, if we enjoy a liberty that is divine, and worship in the reverent confidence of children, remember that the severity of Christ (not the least portion of the cross He bore) was needed for the purchase of that privilege.

Lastly there is the severity of Christ when He was tempted. When Christ was tempted He grew terribly stern—we see Him girding Himself as for some deadly battle. I always feel how real were Christ's temptations, when I mark how severe He grew when faced by them. Just think of that incident on the road up to Jerusalem when Peter would fain have kept Him from the cross. It was love that made Peter hate the cross, and shudder at the thought of Jesus crucified. Now Jesus knew the hidden worth of Peter; knew what a heart he had, and prized his loyalty: yet in that hour

when Peter tempted Him—'Get thee behind Me, Satan!' Could any words be more severe than these? Contrast them with 'Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me?' They tell us that if there is ever an hour for severity, it is the hour when we are tempted from duty by a friend.

I have deliberately chosen to speak on this subject, for I think it is a word that we need to hear to-day. You may not like it, probably you do not; but then I am not here to preach what people like. This is a day of sentiment, and of endless prettinesses. We can ring the changes on the geniality of Jesus. But we need a word to remind us that this most genial Christ can be very stern and rigorous and severe. I have spokén that word, God helping me, to-night. God grant that no one may misinterpret it. His love is endless, His gentleness is infinite, but we dare not ignore the severity of Christ.

X

THE HIGHWAY IN THE SEA

Ps. lxxvii. 19: 'Thy way is in the sea.'

THE three greatest powers in nature, it has been said, are the sky, the mountains, and the sea. Of these three the sky has the widest influence, for it stretches above all men everywhere, and silently and unceasingly affects them by its cloud and its sunshine and its stars. But wherever the mountains are or wherever the sea washes, there too are incalculable influences, and men are wrought upon, they know not how, by being cradled among the hills or by the sea.

Now it is notable that all through the Old Testament, the sky and the mountains and the sea figure conspicuously. Psalmists and prophets never forget the background against which our human drama is played out. There are some books that have no breadth about them; it is almost difficult to breathe while we are reading them; they seem to resolve life into a kind of sentry duty, and they have nothing of the large movement of the world. But there is a breadth and a grandeur in this

literature of the Old Covenant, that is a perennial and noble inspiration. It is not the literature of cell or cloister. It is not the handiwork of some secluded hermit. The breath of the broad world is on its pages, and the sky and the mountains and the sea are there.

Doubtless when the psalmist penned our text his first thought was the crossing of the Red Sea. He was seeking to revive his drooping heart by recalling the saving power of God in Israel's past. But the words of a true poet never end when we have found their literal significance. It is one mark of poetic inspiration that it is capable of indefinite expansion. It is not by narrowing down, it is by widening out, that we get to the real genius of a poet, and the writer of this psalm had the true gift. Thy way is in the sea—were there not glimpses in that of truths which the Exodus never could exhaust? So did the writer feel—so must we all feel—and it is on some of these suggestions that I wish to speak.

First, then, think of the sea as an object of dread.

There were two places above all others dreaded by the Jew. The one was the desert and the other was the sea. The desert—for it was the home of the wild beasts, and the haunt of the robbers who plundered the Jewish villages, and it was across

the desert that these armies came which besieged Jerusalem and pillaged it. And the sea—because it was full of storm and treachery in Jewish eyes; it was the hungry, cruel, insatiable deep. It is very difficult for us who are an island-nation to enter into that feeling of the Jew. The ocean is our defence and our great ally, and we have loved the sound of its waves since we were children. But to the Hebrew it was very different. For him there was no rapture in the lonely shore. He loved his fields and his vineyards and his markets; but the element he dreaded was the sea.

Now comes the voice of the great Jewish singer and says to the people, God's way is in the sea. In the very sphere and element they dread there is the path and purpose of divinity. They loved their gardens and the Lord was there. They loved their vineyards and the Lord was there. In places that were sweet and dear to them there was the presence of the God of Israel. But none the less in the realm of what was terrible, and in the regions which they shunned instinctively, there was the ordered path of the Almighty. I think we should all do well to learn that lesson—God's way is in the very thing we dread. We are so apt to cry that God has forgotten us when the experience which we loathe arrives. We all love health, but we all dread disease. We love success, but we

dread disappointment. We love the energy and glow of life; but we dread the silence of death and the cold grave—but the way of the Lord of heaven is in the sea. Believe that He is working out His purposes through what is dark as well as through what is bright. Believe that what is hardest to bear or understand is never disordered nor purposeless nor pathless. What is the object of thy greatest dread, O Hebrew? Is it the sea? God's way is in the sea.

Again the sea is the abiding home of mystery.

There were long ages when the earth was full of mystery, but the mystery of the earth has largely vanished now. The world has been so explored and mapped and confiscated that the romance of the unknown has passed away. There is no Presbyter John in Central Asia now, with his mighty kingdom in which our forefathers believed. We can buy plans and photographs of Central Asia and we know what Russian regiments are there. Once in the very name Africa, what mystery there was—and now you can telegraph to Lake Nyassa. So slowly and surely as civilization advances, the sense of mystery is being driven from the earth; but all the progress of a thousand centuries will never drive the mystery from the sea. The sea is always lonely, always defiant. You cannot delimit it, you cannot civilize it. You may wean Africa from her state

of savagery but you cannot wean the ocean from her tempests. It is still as of old the mysterious sea.

There is a twofold mystery about the sea. There is first of all the mystery of distance. It stretches away from us, silent and unbroken, until it seems to enter the unknown. No grass-grown prairie and no sand-strewn desert conveys such a vague sense of distance—there is a suggestion of the infinite about the sea. And then there is the mystery of depth, and of all the secrets that are hidden in the depth; the ships that have foundered, the treasure that has sunk, the bones that are lying in its sunless caverns. There are few sights more solemnly impressive than the sight of a burial at sea. Such then is the twofold mystery of ocean—illimitable distance and unfathomed depth. It haunts us by its vastness and by its buried tragedies which we shall never know till the sea gives up its dead.

Do you think it is profitless and idle dreaming to see in that a parable of life? The commonest life in the heart of the common crowd is more mysterious than any ocean, and it is its distance and its depth that make it so. There is that within us which suggests eternity and tells us that three-score years and ten is not the total. Death is a bank of clouds through which we sail, to find clear water on the farther side. It is not the achievements of man which are mysterious: it is the things

which man never can achieve, and which he yet longs and hopes and hungers for, through century after century of failure. It is the reach of it, through death into eternity, that encircles with mystery the life of man. The mystery of distance, then; and that of depth? Ah, you must look within to answer that. They call you shallow, but if they really knew you, I think they would hardly call you that again. There are unfathomable depths in every man that have never been sounded by any human line. There are possibilities and powers and passions, far-sunken so that we peer and cannot see them. Only sometimes there comes an hour of joy, of love, of temptation or of sacrifice, and then the depths seem to disclose their secrets, and we are more mysterious than we dreamed.

Now what impresses me in our Lord Jesus Christ is the manner in which He moved among these mysteries. There is a happy certainty in all His goings there, which assures me that His ways are in the sea. Other men strain their eyes into the future. They guess and speculate and hope and pray. But Jesus never guesses, never speculates; He moves through eternity as if it were His own. He knoweth what is in the distance of the future; He knoweth what is in the darkness of the heart. What a sureness of touch there was in all His dealings with what was deep-

est and darkest in the life around Him. Men did not understand themselves, but they always felt that Jesus understood them. He moved among Life's mysteries as surely as when He walked upon the sea of Galilee.

Once more, the sea is the element of restlessness. That is a familiar thought in the Old Testament, receiving its noblest and most poetic expression in the one hundred and seventh psalm. It is not easy for us to realize how vividly this thought impressed the ancient world, for the most ignorant among us has been taught by science that nothing in the whole universe is at rest. The earth is flying with tremendous speed around the sun; and the solar system itself is hurrying somewhere; we hardly need to turn to the sea-waves to get our parable of restless energy. It was very different with the Jew. For him, the earth was fixed under a fixed heaven. It was set fast by the ordering of God. And over against it, in the sharpest of all contrasts, rocked and surged the unrest of the sea. The sea was the element of change, the home of restlessness. One day it was as calm as if it were asleep; the next it was tossed and rent into a storm. It was all that of which a Jew would think when the word came to him that God's way was in the sea.

Now, there is an unrest in our life that is the consequence and issue of our sin. It is as true

to-day as when the prophet wrote it, that there is no rest for the wicked, saith my God. Let a man deliberately choose the lower levels, and yield up the reins to his baser nature, and his whole existence becomes a great discontent—there is nothing of God's way in that. But there is a restlessness that is inspired, there is a discontent that is divine; there is a spirit within us that will not let us rest, it is the very spirit of the wind-swept sea; and if there is one thing written clear in human history it is that the way of God is there. In one of Shakespeare's sonnets there is a memorable line, 'With what I most enjoy, contented least.' There can be little doubt, from the connection, that Shakespeare is referring to his plays. With what I most enjoy, contented least—then Shakespeare was not satisfied with Hamlet. There is a grand unrest there like the unrest of the ocean, and through the heart of it there runs the track of God. We are not here to be satisfied and rounded. We shall be satisfied when we awake. We are here to strive and yearn and toil and pray for things that are too large for three-score years. And in that distressing and yet divine unrest there is the way and ordering of God. God's way is never in the stagnant pool; His way is ever in the restless sea. It is He who says to us, This is not your rest. It is He who fills us with eternal hope. It is He who makes us rise after each failure

to strive again for what we cannot reach. So we toil on and all we do is fragmentary, but we shall be satisfied in the eternal morning. He keeps us 'climbing up the climbing wave' here; but in heaven there shall be no more sea.

Lastly I would have you note this about the sea: it is the meeting-place of all the waters. Drawn from a hundred countries and a thousand hills they meet and mingle in that ocean-home. The mighty river is there that has flowed through crowded cities and has heard the confused din of busy wharves. The quiet stream is there, where the angler had his haunts and where the hot oxen stood knee-deep in summer. The Highland burn is there, fresh from the heather where it sang amid the silence of the hills. They are no longer apart and isolated. They are not separated in their different channels. They are blended together indistinguishably, and the place where they so mingle is the sea.

There are many things that sadly separate us, and there are many barriers that keep us isolated. There is wealth and there is social position and there is diversity of interest between man and man. There are the different civilizations we are heirs to, and there are the different languages we speak. But it is not in the things that isolate and part us that the way of God is pre-eminently seen: it is in the things that draw us heart to heart; it is in

the meeting-place of all the waters. Be we rich or poor, barbarian or Greek, there is a common heart beating within our bosom. There are needs that are world-wide, hopes that are universal, cravings that are the birthright of humanity. In our sorrows and joys, our hopes and our aspirations we are blended like the waters in the sea. And it is *there*, where we mingle in a common brotherhood, that the seeing eye will find the way of God. Never wait for moments of splendid isolation. Never thank God you are not as other men. Say, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'—at *that* point at any rate the waters mingle. So gradually, in these unfathomed depths, where all the separate streams of life are one, we shall distinguish the footprints of the Almighty, and we shall say, 'His way is in the sea.

XI

CHRISTIAN PATRIOTISM

Ps. cxxxvii. 5 : 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.'

ONLY a few days have gone since we were startled by the tidings of the gross outrage which had been perpetrated by the Russian fleet upon our trawlers. The news became common property on Monday morning; by Monday night there was not a village so remote but had heard it; and on Tuesday morning the press of the whole country, irrespective of all differences of party, gave strong and passionate yet dignified utterance to the indignation of the national heart. Now what was the meaning of that indignation? Was it mere resentment of an act of cowardly bullying? I venture to think it was something far more pure, and something far more significant, than that. The national voice was the voice of the purest patriotism; mingling with all our horror of the act, and all our pity for the desolated homes,—mingling with all that, and consecrating it, there was a sense of national right and national duty.

It was not only love of justice that was speaking, it was love of country even more than love of justice. I have thought, then, that this might be a fitting moment to say one or two words upon the virtue of patriotism, more especially in its relation to the gospel.

Now in the first place—and I think we shall all admit this—there is a blustering and hectoring and noisy patriotism with which religion can have nothing whatever to do. Some of you will remember a remark of Dr Johnson, and Dr Johnson was a true lover of his country spite of this remark: 'Patriotism,' said Dr Johnson once, 'is the last refuge of a scoundrel.' That is a remarkably incisive utterance, and yet we can detect at once the element of truth in it. The Doctor meant that when a man's own life is ragged, and when there is everything to be ashamed of in his own career, it is very easy and it is very comforting to brag about the greatness of one's country. You may depend upon it that if a man be bad, his patriotism never can be good. You may depend upon it that in the last analysis love of one's country is a moral virtue. The patriotism of the music-halls, that breaks into wild cheering at some song of jingoism, is worthless as a national asset.

But there is another patriotism which is not loud nor noisy, and which is perhaps the most unselfish of all the virtues; a patriotism so woven out of a

thousand strands of memory and of affection and of hope, that there is no passion on earth, save the love of a good woman, that can make a man so valiant to live, or so ready, at the bugle-call, to die. The memories of a great past are in that patriotism—of kings and lawgivers and statesmen and captains and thinkers; the recollection of immortal deeds is in it, when the ground was dyed with blood which hallowed it; there is in it the indefinable appeal of the hills and the moors and the fields where men were born; and over all is the dim and awful sense that a nation is the creation of God's providence, in whose great story the finger of God has moved, and with whose great task none others must interfere. No sentiment is more human than true patriotism, and none is more signally divine. It takes the dearest memories of earth and links them with the august purposes of heaven. So gradually is created that love of country which roots in the homestead yet reaches to God's throne, and which, when it finds a voice as it did the other day, has an accent of irresistible authority.

Now of course we shall be ready to admit that patriotism is not exclusively a Christian virtue. It is not like humility, or meekness, or patient cross-bearing, which were not virtues at all till Jesus made them so. Much of the noblest patriotism that the world has known has been witnessed in

countries that knew nothing of Christ Jesus: the love of country, like a mother's love for her children, blossomed and fruited long before Christ was born. The tale of Thermopyle is not a Christian tale, yet as an instance of patriotism it is well-nigh peerless. The most famous line in literature about dying for one's country was written by a Roman and a pagan. And in this awful and desolating war, which is soaking with blood the fields of the Far East, one thing has emerged to make every heart beat faster, and that is the patriotism of the Japanese. I read in the newspapers the other day a letter from a Japanese officer to some friends in England. It was a very calm and business-like epistle, with little trace of sentiment about it. But after the signature, in true Western fashion, was a postscript, and in the postscript, as occasionally happens, was the news, for it said, 'P.S. I have just been ordered to the front, where it will be a pleasure to die for my country.' I wish all postscripts from our Christian homes were as instinct with magnificent sentiment as that. A duty? a stern necessity? even that would have been something: but *a pleasure* to die—that makes a land invincible. When death is sweet to a people for their country's sake there is little danger to them from any Baltic fleet. Patriotism, then, is not a Christian virtue only. The Greeks were all patriots, so are the Japanese. Long

before Christ was born, and far beyond Christendom, the love of country has been powerful.

But just as the sunshine falling on the trees kindles them into unsuspected splendours, and just as the love of the mother for her child has been ennobled and transfigured by Christ Jesus, so the love of one's country, that is a common heritage implanted in the natural heart by God, has been touched into new glory by Christ Jesus. What are the features, then, of distinctively Christian patriotism? What is the impress that has been laid on this virtue by Christ? To answer that I shall ask you to think for a moment on the patriotism of Jesus Christ Himself.

For remember that though the patriotism of Jesus be obscured by His world-wide mission and His care for single souls, there has never moved across this earth a truer patriot than the prophet of Nazareth at whose feet we bow. He was a Jew after the flesh, and that is enough. With all the passion of a Jew He loved His country. You will never understand Christ's hatred of the Pharisees, nor will you ever comprehend His tears over Jerusalem, unless you remember that the lover of mankind was also a lover of His little country. I have sometimes thought that patriotism is never so strong as when the country that inspires it is a little one. Britain is little, Switzerland is little, Japan is little, Palestine was little, and these are

the countries, perhaps above all others, where love of the home-land has been supreme. Into that heritage, then, Christ Jesus entered. He was a prophet: He was the Son of David. The past was alive for Him, and the hills and the lochs were dear—twice dear because consecrated with such holy memories. Then, working on that natural inheritance, the Spirit of God within Him quite illumined it, so that from that hour to this there have been features in Christian patriotism, which set it apart in the experience of the world.

What, then, distinguished the patriotism of Jesus? two features, and first the absence of contempt. There was no scorn of other nationalities, nor was there any disdain of outlanders, in the deep-seated patriotism of Jesus Christ. The Greek was a patriot, but the other side of his patriotism was the conviction that everyone else was a barbarian. The Jew was a patriot, but the other side of his patriotism was an infinite scorn for the whole mass of Gentiles. And Jesus of Nazareth—He too was a patriot, with a patriotism as sincere as that of any Greek, but the other side of His patriotism was this, that God so loved the world. He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet in His parable He declared 'the field is the world.' He never preached beyond the boundaries of His Israel, yet He foresaw the day of a universal gospel. So for the first time in human

history, the claims of the whole wide world were recognised, and the disdain that had been part and parcel of true patriotism once, was banished from that Christian grace for ever. Are you in your own quiet way a Christian patriot? Then you will never call anybody a little yellow monkey. It is a godless thing to belittle one's own country. It is almost as godless to belittle other people's. There is a mission and a destiny for all. There is one gospel that is to bind all together. It is a characteristic, then, of Christ's patriotism that there is no room on its bosom for contempt.

The second feature of Christ's patriotism was His recogition that the worst enemies of a people are their sins. Christ would have said of countries what Paul said of himself, 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness.' To the average Jew the great enemy was Rome, for Rome had enslaved Palestine. To the average Jew the first task of a true patriot was to hurl defiance at that intruding power. It is very significant and very strange that no such defiance fell from the lips of Jesus. How men would have hailed Him had He cried 'Woe unto you, ye Romans!' With His gifts and His eloquence and His Davidic birth, He would have been the hero of the people. But He never cried 'Woe unto you, ye Romans': He cried, 'Woe unto ye, ye scribes and Pharisees': and that, too, was the cry

of a patriot, only it brought the patriot to Calvary. For it means that in the eyes of Jesus Christ there are worse enemies than spears and swords: there are national foes that can be far more deadly than the battalions of an invading army. In the long run if any nation perishes, it is not another's guns, it is its own sins, that ruin it. Christ taught that by His life. Christ sealed that by His death. It is the second great feature of His patriotism.

And so you see that what we call Christian patriotism is a far wider and larger thing than the world knew of once. It is not confined to high service in the state, nor does it need to wait for the trumpet call of battle. Wherever men are fighting against evil in their own hearts, in their own village or town, wherever there is brave and steady effort to give us a purer, a better, and a soberer land, *there* there is Christian patriotism just as surely as in the heroic daring of the field of war. You are a Christian patriot in business, if you determine to be honourable there. You are a Christian patriot in the home, if you hold high ideals before your little family. When a young man masters the devil in his secret heart, that very resistance is an act of patriotism. No Greek would ever have dreamed of saying that; but Greece has perished because she never knew it. Love of one's country has become intensely moral since Jesus of Nazareth lived and taught

and died. 'Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever.' To be bravely good is the very crown of patriotism. And when it is hard to cling fast in the darkness to the best that is so near and yet so far, say

> 'Rock of Ages cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee.'

c Moffatt's "Reason Reason" p 45

XII

THE WISH TO ESCAPE

Jer. ix. 2: 'Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!'

Jer. xl. 4-6: 'And now, behold, I loose thee this day from the chains which were upon thine hand. If it seem good unto thee to come with me into Babylon, come; and I will look well unto thee: but if it seem ill unto thee to come with me into Babylon, forbear: behold, all the land is before thee: whither it seemeth good and convenient for thee to go, thither go. Now while he was not yet gone back, he said, Go back also to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon hath made governor over the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people: or go wheresoever it seemeth convenient unto thee to go. So the captain of the guard gave him victuals and a reward, and let him go. Then went Jeremiah unto Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and dwelt with him among the people that were left in the land.'

A FEW words will make clear to you why I have brought these two passages together. Jeremiah was a man of highly sensitive temperament, very different from the confident and bold Isaiah. And he was liable to that swift access of despondency which such a temperament is sure to bring. Like Elijah, he was perfectly fearless in his ministry; like Elijah, also, he could be overpowered with melancholy: and it was when he was in the grip of such a mood that he uttered this passionate longing for release. O that I might get away from my

own people! That I might lay down this burden of responsibility! That I might fly to some little country inn—for so the words mean—where I might just watch the faces that come and those that go! Such was the mood of the prophet when he wrote this verse. It is a mood which we can all appreciate.

Then in the second passage we discover that the hour came when that longing could be gratified. Jerusalem was captured by the armies of Babylon, and the king of Babylon was Jeremiah's friend. Let Jeremiah come to Babylon, then: he will not be imprisoned or persecuted there. He will be rich and honoured and fed from the king's table; all his weary burdens will be done with; but Jeremiah said, 'I cannot go.' The hour came when his longing could be gratified; but when it came, he crushed the longing in the dust. He had cried wildly, 'O that I could escape'; but when escape was possible he turned his back on it. He went to Mizpah with Gedaliah, and though only the dregs of Judah had been left there, still—dregs or no dregs—they were his own people, and like a gallant soul he would not leave them.

Such, then, is the historical setting of our text, and so I am led to our subject for to-night. I shall divide what I have to say under these heads. First, We all feel sometimes the longing to escape.

Second, This longing betrays itself in many ways. Third, The duty of a Christian is to crush it.

First, then, we all feel sometimes the longing to escape. To escape from what?—in the first place from monotony. When day after day men rise to the same task, when morning by morning—Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter—the hands have to take up the same weary drudgery, then sooner or later comes the rebellious hour when the heart craves passionately for escape. That hour comes sometimes through the reading of books which bring home to us the rich and varied action of humanity; sometimes when other lives that seem so unrestrained are brought into bitter contrast with our own; and sometimes when the first signs of Spring have come, when the awakening earth woos us to liberty, when the warmth of the sun and the breath of the wind are on us. In such ways the mood of rebellion is begotten. We fret and chafe at the dulness of our days. The dreary monotony of daily work grows odious. There surges within us the longing for release. I want you to remember that that very longing surged in the noble heart of Jeremiah.

Or again responsibility may cause it—the pressure of responsibility and care—not the weary weight of this unintelligible world, but just the burdens that lie at our own doors. I noted in the *Spectator* the other day this pithy sentence about

the Czar of Russia: 'The humblest citizen of this Empire,' said the *Spectator*, 'may congratulate himself that the Czar would willingly change places with him.' Yet one does not need to be Czar of all the Russias, ruined by false counsellers, and ringed with murder, to enter into the wish of Jeremiah. For as life advances —if it is being *well* lived—responsibilities are bound to gather. Business increases, influence extends, the life of the home is larger and fuller and deeper. In hours of high courage, too, and when the heart is strong, men enter on the public service of their city, and that weight must be carried through many a thankless day. So again is the prophet's mood begotten. Men long for release,—to lay the burden down. They think how supremely happy life would be without the black care that sits behind the horseman. And I ask you to notice that that thought was not a stranger to the noble heart of Jeremiah.

So are there hours when we long to escape from monotony. So are there hours when we long to escape from care. But to most of us there come hours when the great longing is to escape from ourselves.

> 'O that a man might arise in me,
> That the man I am might cease to be!'

Who has not felt the uprising of a mood such as the poet voices in these words? We begin by

thinking that if we could change our lot, we should be very happy and contented. If we could only get away into new scenes, we imagine that it would be infinitely restful. But as we grow older, and perhaps wiser, we discover that go where we will we carry our own hearts with us, and that what we really craved for—although we did not know it—was not a change of scene but change of self. We come to know ourselves so well as life proceeds: our weaknesses, our limitations. There are men who have everything to make them happy, yet somehow they have not the genius to be happy. Hence springs the strange rebellion of unrest; the wish for the wings of the morning that we might fly away, not merely from the burden of our lot, but from the heavier burden of ourselves.

But I pass on, and in the second place, this longing betrays itself in many ways.

Firstly it betrays itself in day-dreams. I recall a passage somewhere in the writings of the late Dr Parker of the City Temple. He is speaking of the strain and stress of the great work that God had given him to do in London. 'Ah,' he says, 'when I am in the thick of it, what a help my rose-covered cottage is to me'—and the rose-covered cottage was the cottage of his dreams, where he would spend his days when the toil and moil were over. It had no existence, nor was it ever

realised; he died in harness amid the roar of Babylon: but he carried the thought of its beauty in his heart, and the day-dream betrayed the longing to escape. Who knows what thoughts are weaving in your heart while the hands are busy plying the daily task? Who knows what dreams you dream or what visions you see, through the dull drudgery of common days? It is one of the great offices of imagination to be a refuge when we are in rebellion against facts. This strange diversity, then, between the outward life and the inward and wide-ranging and visionary life; this falling back on imaginative day-dream when we are sore beset by actuality, all this is a sure indication and betrayal of the deep-seated longing to escape.

Again it betrays itself in pleasure, and especially in the craving for exciting pleasure. The very charm of excitement lies in this, that it helps men for a little to forget. In quiet and happy times pleasures are quiet. Men feel no need of violent reaction. They are tolerably contented with their lot, and they feel no imperious summons to release. But when life grows stern, and its conditions hard, when poverty is grinding, and competition fierce, then springs the vehement desire for some escape, and the escape for multitudes is pleasure. That is why, in a day like the one we live in, there is such a widespread craving for excitement. That

is why plays and novels must be sensational. That is why crowds flock to entertainments for the sake of one swift moment when the breath is held in the presence of some daring and life-risking leap. There have been times when men would not have tolerated such things. But to-day they are not merely tolerated, they are popular; and they draw the crowd, because, for one brief instant, they give complete escape from sordid and sunless lives. In the mad whirl of pleasure, then, and in excitement, in the passion of gambling and in the curse of drink, —in these things, whatever else there be, there is at least the reaction of relief: there is the betrayal of that deep-seated longing which I am trying to follow and unravel this evening—the deep-seated longing to escape.

And then does it not betray itself in theories? For there are men too resolute to seek relief in dreams and too earnest to degrade themselves with pleasure; yet they too make their channels of escape. How easy it is to blind ourselves to facts, when we once adopt some theory about them! How easy to prophesy smooth things—to cry peace when there is no peace—to shut our eyes and say, All's right with the world! The prophets in Jeremiah's time did that, and many a prophet has done that since then. It is one of the noble merits of Christ Jesus that He looked the facts of existence in the face. Whatever He explained—

or whatever He did not explain—at least He never explained anything away. He never made light of sin—He never smiled at death—in the fool's hope of making the burden lighter. My point is that that is what men often do. They weave their theories to make the burden lighter. They speak of sin and death and poverty and care in a way that is irreconcilable with facts. It is not truth they are seeking, it is ease. It is not actuality, it is relief. They want the world to be golden, and they make it so, though it is full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despair—and remember, there is a cowardice of mind, no less than a cowardice upon the field of battle. When I see, then, and I see it every day, how men turn away from the straight gaze of Christ, and when I see how they run to philosophies and theories which have no cry in them, no cross, no blood—only harmonious and flattering music—to me at least that is another betrayal of the strange yet quenchless longing to escape.

First, then, We all feel sometimes the longing to escape. Second, This longing betrays itself in many ways. Thirdly, and in a word or two, The duty of a Christian is to crush it. However instinctively this wish may rise, it must when it rises be sternly combated. This is our duty every day we live, because of the example of Christ Jesus.

Think, for instance, of the spirit of Christ when He set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem. He was going to be betrayed and crucified there, and He was speaking to His disciples about it all. And Peter said to Him 'Far be it from Thee, Lord: this shall not happen to Thee: Thou shalt not be crucified.' And Jesus, in a flash, turned upon Peter—'Get thee behind me, Satan.' Why that intensity—that burning word as if from a heart stirred to its very centre? Why, but because Christ had been tempted like Jeremiah to throw the burden down and fly away: and the intensity and strength of the rebuke, that broke like a sea wave on Simon's heart, tells how the temptation to escape was crushed.

Think of Gethsemane, that scene among the olive-trees, when great drops as of blood were sweated to the ground. And Peter was there again, and James and John; and the three, outworn and outwearied, were asleep. Hark to the words that are wrung from the Saviour's heart, 'O my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me!' What is that, but the wild cry of all humanity, to flee from its Calvary and be at rest? Yet immediately, 'Not My will, but Thine be done. I am here not to do My will but Thine, O God.' And that instant recognition of the Father, and the immediate owning of His will, tells how in the very moment that the wish was

formed, the wish—to escape, to flee away—was crushed.

There is a little children's hymn which goes like this,

> 'Had I the wings of a dove I would fly,
> Far, far away, far away.'

There have been many foolish and unworthy hymns: I question if there was ever one so foolish as that. If that is the use to which we would put our wings, it is an infinite mercy that they have never grown. We are here as stewards, and a steward must be faithful. We are called to be soldiers, not to be deserters. We are set here by an ordering God not to fly away, but to hold on and fight on and trust on, to the end. Go back to Mizpah, then, with Gedaliah. Reject and renounce the liberty of Babylon. However weary the work be, or however sore the cross, grapple it to thy soul with hooks of steel. It is for such lives, not necessarily triumphing, but at least strenuous and quietly brave and faithful, that there will be the 'well done, good and faithful servant,' in the hour when the labourer's task is o'er.

XIII

THE INTRUSIVENESS OF CHRIST

Jn. xx. 19: 'When the doors were shut . . . for fear of the Jews, came Jesus.'

THIS was a very memorable Sunday evening, one of the most memorable that history has known. The grave was empty, Christ Jesus had arisen, and slowly the glad truth was reaching the disciples. First had come the tidings of Mary Magdalene; then the thrilling experience of Peter; and now the two travellers to Emmaus had come in, and had just done telling what had befallen them. Can we not imagine what a conflict of emotions surged and throbbed in the disciples' hearts? Some believed instantly: some could not crush their doubt: some passed in swift alternation through glory and despair. And it was then that the doors being shut for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst of them. How exquisitely fitting was His first word 'Peace!' Peace was the very thing which they lacked, that evening. We may always trust Christ, in His unerring tact, to say the right word at the right moment.

But the words I ask you specially to consider to-night are these: 'when the doors were shut for fear of the Jews.' They suggest to me two lines of thought, which I shall ask you to follow for a little. The first is, We may close the doors on Christ unwittingly. The second is, Though we close the doors on Christ we do not shut Him out. May God grant us His guidance as we proceed.

First, then, we may close the doors on Christ unwittingly; that, you see, is what the disciples did. When they shut and locked the doors of the upper chamber they never meant to bar them against Jesus. They were afraid of the Jews, the gospel frankly tells us—and there are few books so frank as the Bible is. They had not been born yet into the heroism of Pentecost: they had not been baptised into the spirit of fearlessness. Had they heard the trampling of Jewish feet upon the stair, and the beating of Jewish staves upon the door, I daresay they would have thought that all was lost. So they made fast the door for fear of the Jews. That was their only object when they barred it. Yet you and I, reading the story together, detect that they were doing more than they imagined, for unwittingly they had closed the door on Christ.

Now there is a lesson in that thought on which you and I do well to ponder. It is that we may close the door on all that is best and worthiest, and

yet we can honestly say we never *meant* to do it. I do not think there are many here to-night who have deliberately resolved to shut out Christ. This is an age of such uncertainty, that most men are too uncertain even to be sceptics. But there are doors we may close, never thinking of Christ Jesus; there are lines of conduct in common life we may pursue, and we never dream that we are raising barriers between ourselves and the highest and the best; but in the end of the day for us, as for the disciples, it will be found that we have done more than we imagined—we have closed the door unwittingly on Christ.

Many of you will remember the experience of Mr Darwin which with his customary truthfulness he has chronicled. He tells us that through years of absorption in science he lost the power of appreciating Shakespeare. He had no quarrel with Shakespeare—how could he have? He knew that he stood peerless and unparalleled. But Darwin for years had given heart and brain, with magnificent persistency, to certain studies; every power had been rivetted and every faculty absorbed in the enthusiastic search for certain truths—and then, when he came back to Shakespeare once again, with kindling memories of how he had loved him once, he had closed the door unwittingly on Shakespeare. It is a comparatively small matter when Shakespeare is concerned. It is supremely

important when it is Jesus Christ. It may even be worth while sometimes to close the door on Shakespeare. But to close it on Christ is always a tragic thing. See, I beseech you, that you are not living and acting as the disciples did upon that Lord's day evening, when for fear of the Jews they shut the door, and unwittingly closed it on their Lord.

There are many ways in which men commit this error. Think for example of the formation of friendships. Many a young man is ruined by his enemies, but more young men are ruined by their friends. It is amazing how easily some people form their friendships; how they make them on the line of least resistance; how they fail to realise what is implied in that mystical and mighty name of friend. So friendships are lightly and improvidently made, and slowly and secretly character degenerates; until at last that friendship (unworthy of the name), begun in the comradeship of some light-hearted hour, closes the door on a hundred noble things, and among them on the beauty of Christ Jesus. Or think again of the choices that we make—and we exercise our noblest prerogative in choosing. Every morning we rise, every day that we go forth, our choices make us or our choices mar us. Some day a choice more momentous than usual comes. We are face to face with one of life's great decisions. And we

have not been living on high levels, and so we choose amiss, for a man's whole life is in every choice he makes. Then the days pass, and the issues show themselves, and the choice works itself out in life and character, and a hundred glorious things are tarnished and are tainted as the result of one disastrous choice. We never meant to shut out power and purity, but they have receded into the dim distance ever since. We never thought to grow heart-weary and world-weary, but that may follow from one mismanaged choosing. Like the disciples, beset by some poor fear, unwittingly we have closed the door on Christ.

But perhaps the commonest of all causes of this great error lies in the spirit that will not take things seriously. I would never ask a young man or woman to be solemn, but I would always urge a young man or woman to be serious. We read to-night the parable of the marriage feast, and we noted how the invited guests made light of it. Do you think these guests had been serious and earnest men up to the hour when they received that invitation? God does not tamper with character like that. No man begins to be frivolous by mocking kings. When they were children they had made light of home and had thought little of a mother's love; when they were youths they had made light of purity, for they thought that to be immoral was a manly thing. Now comes the in-

vitation of the king, the crowning and decisive moment of their lives, and in that moment all their past is concentrated, and scripture tells us they made light of that. One thing is certain, they never meant to do it. They never thought that it would come to this. Thoughtlessly they closed the door on reverent feeling, on devoutness and on chivalry and on purity. But the curse of such levity is that it involves far more than we shall ever know till the years have unrolled their story. In tampering with the least we touch the greatest. We begin by closing the door on little decencies, and unwittingly we close the door on Christ.

But now I pass on (and I do so very gladly) to the second and evangelical message of our text. That message is, though we close the doors on Christ yet we do not shut Him out. That night in Jerusalem the disciples found it so. Suddenly, though every lock was turned, Christ was among them. They had closed the door on Him not knowing what they did, yet for all that they did not shut Him out.

In studying the life of Christ on earth I have often been struck with that note of the inevitable. Men tried to escape Him—adjured Him to depart—yet though all the doors were shut, Jesus confronted them. I think of the Gadarene demoniac in the tombs. He was an object of terror, so that all men fled from him. He had shut out his nearest

and dearest by his wildness, but for all his wildness he could not shut out the Lord. 'What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God—art Thou come hither to torment us before our time?' He could escape from his chains; he could not escape from Jesus. Lo! he is sitting clothed and in his right mind.

Or I think of Christ in relation to Jewish history, and I feel once again that He was unavoidable. For the whole struggle of scribes and pharisees and priests was to close the door on Christ and keep Him out. They refused to acknowledge Him and they would make no place for Him; He was a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber; not this man but Barabbas! Everything that malevolence could do was done, everything that spite could suggest was swiftly practised, to discredit the name, and sully the reputation, of this prophet who mourned with tears over Jerusalem. Did it succeed? Was the door really shut? Was Christ barred out from the destinies of Judaism? Ah, sirs, every page of Jewish story reveals the futility of that endeavour. The most potent influence in Judaism is Christ Jesus. He has determined its fortunes and its fall. He is inextricably blended with its blood and anguish. He is the day-star of its only hope. They closed the door on Him—beat Him off—said He is done with now: but for all that they could not shut Him out.

If that was true in history I want you to believe that it is true to-night. For weal or woe, whatever walls you raise, Christ passes through them all and gets to you. There are deeds that we did long since, perhaps twenty years ago, but to this hour unexpectedly they rise and meet us. There were moments of exquisite happiness in our past, and even to-day their memory is like music. You cannot shut out the thought of intense hours: no change of years will prevent them winning through. And like the ineffaceable memory of such scenes is the presence and the beauty of the Lord. Christ is inevitable. Christ is unavoidable. I want that thought to sink into your hearts. Close every door against Him if you will: the mystery is that you do not shut Him out.

Sometimes He comes through the closed door, just because all life is penetrated with Him. We talk of the Christian atmosphere we breathe, but the atmosphere is more than Christian, it is Christ. This is the Lord's day—who then is this Lord? We may have closed the door on Him, but He is here. We cannot date one letter in the morning, but we mean that one thousand nine hundred and five years ago Christ was born. He meets us at every turn of the road, in every newspaper and in every problem. Our life is so interpenetrated with Christ Jesus that to avoid Him is an impossibility.

Sometimes He meets us in a noble character, in a man who is a living argument for religion. And though we have resolved to have nothing to do with Christ, yet we feel in a moment that Christ is by our side. Creeds may mean nothing to us; we may have left off church-going; the dust may have gathered thick upon our Bibles; but accidentally we meet some man or some woman, having the hall-mark of the genuine Christian, and through the shut door we know that Christ is here.

And sometimes it is in our deeper hours that He so comes. It is in the darker and more tragic moments of our life. It is when the sun has ceased to shine, and the birds have ceased to sing; when we are baffled and broken and disappointed. We closed the door on Him when we were strong and vigorous, for we did not want the intrusion of the cross; but when life's deeps are uncovered then it is God we need, and through the shut doors Christ is in the midst.

In closing let me say this single word: am I speaking to any whose sin has made them hopeless? It may be there is some one here to-night who seems to have closed every door upon Christ Jesus. Have you been living for years in secret sin? Or has one great sin besmirched and blackened everything? The result of it all is that to-night you seem utterly callous, incapable of faith, cold as

a stone. My brother or sister, things are not utterly hopeless. Even to-night you may have the benediction. Through every barrier—in the teeth of every obstacle—that presence which is life and power may be yours. Christ is a spirit—nothing can hold Him back. There is no road-maker in all the world like love. Cry out, 'Thou Son of God, come to my heart!' and though all the doors have been shut, He will be there.

XIV

THE TENT AND THE CITY

Heb. xi. 9, 10: 'By faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for a city which hath foundations.'

In this great chapter, the roll-call of the heroes, Abraham occupies a very honourable place. His life was so pre-eminently one of faith in God that in this muster of the faithful that was inevitable. There have been men who in some great hour of life or death have risen to a sublime heroism of trust. There have been others whose faith has been most notable in the quiet tenor of uneventful days. But the faith of Abraham did not fail nor falter when he was commanded to sacrifice his son; it rarely deserted him in the days which had no history, as he rose, and toiled, and slumbered in his tent; and it is this inclusiveness—this reach from the least to the greatest—which makes the faith of Abraham unique. Never forget that the faith which we profess should dominate us as Abraham was dominated. That man is not to be

reckoned a religious man whose religion is shewn in a few shining hours. Like the glow of health which spreads through a man's whole being, it must show itself in every deed and every day. The temple may manifest it, but so must the tent.

Abraham, then, was a dweller in a tent: that fact had made a deep impression on the writer; and immediately he tells us the secret of that tent-life—he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. The tent and the city, then: that is my theme to-night. What thought does that sharp antithesis suggest? I shall group what I wish to say under these heads. First, It is the tent which makes the city precious. Second, It is the city which explains the tent.

First, then, it is the tent which makes the city precious. We see at a glance that it was so with Abraham. It was the very insecurity of that tent-life, the isolation of it and its thousand perils, that made the dream of a city so infinitely sweet. Had Abraham spent all his days within strong walls he would never have known the power of that ideal. Mingling with other men in crowded thoroughfares, and sharing in the security of numbers, life would have been too rich, too full, too safe, to leave any place or power for this vision. But life in the tent left room and verge enough. What could be frailer than that covering of skin which

shook and flapped at every wandering breeze? How it strained when the blast from the hills swept down on it! How the lashing rain in the dark night would soak it! It is in such surroundings, perilous, lonely, comfortless, that men begin to dream about a city. *That* is the meaning of God's treatment of Abraham. That is why God housed him in a tent. It was not to harden him nor yet to crush his pride; it was to waken him to the worth of the ideal. It took the tent so fragile and unstable, so lightly rooted, so easily overswept, to make God's promise and prospect of a city a very precious thing to Abraham.

I cannot help thinking that as God dealt with Abraham, so does He deal in providence with us all. There is a flood of light poured on life's darker aspects for me, when I remember the city and the tent. After all the important thing is not what we live in; the supremely important thing is what we look for. It is not my actual achievement which is vital; it is the purpose, the aim, the direction of my life. If life is to be redeemed from sense and time, and brought under the powers that are eternal, the eyes must be opened somehow to God's city. And how shall I open them? says the Almighty. How shall I make the unseen city precious? The answer to that lies in the tent of Abraham—so insecure,

so perilous and so frail. From which I learn that much of life's harder discipline, and many a dark hour that men are called to, is given to humanity, by Abraham's God, that hearts may begin to hunger for the city.

For example think of sickness in that light. Is *it* not often the tent that makes the city precious? A man must be finely dowered and finely strung if perfect health does not dull his vision a little. When morning by morning through unbroken years a man has no pain, no sufferings, no frailty —it is strange if there be not some stars across the sky to which the perpetual sunshine does not blind him. But sooner or later to most men there comes sickness; they are sent out like Abraham into the lonely tent. They waken at night to feel their insecurity: another blast and the tent may be in ruins. And who does not know when such hours have come and gone how the eyes have been opened to a thousand things? Springtime is sweeter and the joys of the common day; there is not a bird in the tree but sings with richer music. Home is more precious, and the playing of children, and the love we leaned on far too little once. There is not a promise of God but has new meaning; there is not a prayer but somehow is more real. We did not want that tent-life of the sickroom: we did not choose it; it seemed an interruption. We thought it hard that in the midst of activity should come

'the blind fury with the abhorred shears.' But for us, as for Abraham, it was purposed after all; and somehow the tent has made the city precious.

In the same light also we may look on death. For we must never forget that death is more than a tragedy. It is shrouded in unutterable loss, yet in the midst of the loss God has implanted gain. There is nothing in the world so cruel as death, nothing so pitiless or so remorseless. It fills the heart with a loneliness far deeper than that of the solitary tent of Abraham. Yet how many homes have been purified by death! How many hearts that once were utterly worldly, have been taught to think of heaven through bereavement! There are some things that are never seen so clearly as when they are seen through the sad veil of tears. Death has made tender every human tie; death has made possible the sweetest memories; like the darkened glass through which we can look at the sun, the shadow of death has given us power of vision. It is impossible to say how self-centred we had been, how selfish, how blind to the unseen and eternal, had the world never known the mystery of death. It is the tent, then, which has made the city precious. It is the frailty, the insecurity, the loneliness that have turned men's hearts to the abiding things. Like Abraham we are led out to a strange land, with only a few frail cords to hold

our dwellings, until the city of God, deep-founded and eternal, never to be shaken and never overthrown, becomes infinitely attractive to the heart.

Nor can I leave this subject without pointing out to you how it bears evangelically upon the fact of sin. Many a man is brought to see his need of Christ by the same experience as was vouchsafed to Abraham. God has a hundred ways of making Christ Jesus precious. The avenues to the feet of the Saviour are innumerable. There is nothing more dangerous than to teach that in coming to Christ all men must have the same uniform experience Often it is to all that is best in us that Christ appeals; it is on our highest and best side that Christ approaches: we look for a Saviour and we recognise Him because we are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. But often—remember—it is the very opposite; it is not our best but our worst that makes the Saviour precious. God leads us to Christ not by our brightest hopes, but by deepening in our hearts the sense of sin. Never did David so feel his need of God as when he cried 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.' Convicted of his guilt and conscious of his wickedness, God in that hour became most precious. And so in us, when the old satisfaction goes, when we feel our unworthiness and when we cry 'Unclean, unclean' —in that very moment are we ready to see Christ as

infinitely fairer than we ever dreamed. We are made lonely, that we may need His fellowship. We are shown our helplessness that we may see His power. We are taught by the spirit of God how worthless is our righteousness, that our eyes may be opened to the righteousness of Christ. Like Abraham, we are made to dwell in tents—ragged, unsightly, insecure, and lonely—but it is the tent which makes the city precious.

But I pass on now, and in the second place: it is the city which explains the tent. We could never have understood the life of Abraham, never have rightly appreciated his behaviour, if the Bible had not told us the hope that was in his heart—he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. Abraham was a very wealthy man and there was nothing to prevent him building a home in Canaan. Had he raised a palace for himself there, and had he fortified it, it would have seemed a perfectly natural thing to do. He had been bred in the country of Chaldaea, where walls were mighty and castles were magnificent; towers, fortresses, buttresses, castellations—on such things had he feasted his boyish eyes. Doubtless he hoped, as many a boy has done, for the day when he should build a castle for himself. But the day comes when he is free to do it, yet never one stone is laid upon another. He is rich and powerful, let him build his fortress

now. But he gives not one thought to it; he dwells in tents. And you will never understand that tent, never know why Abraham chose it, until you are told the secret of his heart. Others might dwell in tents because they were lazy. Others might dwell in tents because they were misers. Others might dwell in tents because they were restless, and had the spirit of wandering in their blood. But the conduct of Abraham is not to be explained so: it is his vision which interprets it. You learn the secret of the tent when you remember that he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God.

Now does not this suggest to us a caution when we are tempted to be rash in judgment? I am amazed at the rash and foolish way in which we pass judgments on each other. Of our brother's hidden life we know so little, of the ideals that are haunting him we are so ignorant—yet we look at the tent he lives in and we judge him by it, as if we could read the meaning of the thing. But you may depend upon it that you will never know a man until you know the hopes which animate him. You may think that the tent proclaims the man a sluggard; but in the sight of God it may seal him as a saint. And it is because we are ignorant of the secret of our brother, and of all that is stirring and calling in

his heart, that so often we judge him very falsely.

Here for example is a young man with what we call a strong artistic temperament. And nothing will satisfy him but to be an artist; by night and by day he dreams of little else. Every one tries to dissuade him from that calling: it is painted to him in the blackest colours; ne is warned of the disappointment he will meet with; but it is all useless, he will not give it up. Then come long years of hardship—perhaps starvation—and men smile at him and say 'What a fool he was! If he had only become a partner in his father's business, how very comfortable he might have been!' But the heaven-born artist is looking for a city, he is haunted by the vision of ideal beauty: the world is a palace to him, it is full of joy, he can see all the stars from the door of his poor tent. Men pity him, and count up what he has forfeited; but he is a thousand times richer than the men who pity him. They cannot understand why he is radiant, for it takes the city to explain the tent.

Or here is a young woman who instead of living idly, resolves to be of some service while she can. She has been eating her heart out with having nothing to do, but now she has been wakened by the grace of God. Once the

puzzle was how to kill time; now the problem is how to expand it. There is so much to do, so many lives to help, so many services of all kinds to render. Deliberately she forsakes much that was sweet, dwelling in tabernacles with the heirs of the same promise: she is often weary visiting the poor, for life is a sterner thing than she had dreamed. And her old friends, perhaps her own sisters and brothers, cannot understand this change at all. But her eyes have been opened—that is the reason of it—she is looking for a city that hath foundations now. She has felt the constraining power of the love of Christ. *That* has become her secret and her song. It is the Spirit of Jesus, welcomed to her heart, which interprets the lowly service of the life. It takes the city to explain the tent.

Brethren and sisters, it makes all the difference in the world what you and I are looking for to-night. It is by what our hearts are set on and by what our thoughts are given to that the tent we dwell in is glorified or cursed. In the roomiest mansion a man may still be miserable, if there is nothing but that dwelling in his heart. In the poorest tent a man may still be happy, if he looks for a city where is the love of God. I earnestly entreat of you to look to God; to fix your gaze on the Lord Jesus Christ; to lift up your hearts to Him continually; to say 'O Lamb of

God, I come.' That was the secret of the peace of Abraham. That will make any tent become a temple. We can do much, bear more, and be amazingly happy, when our life is hid with Christ in God.

XV

THE BURNING HEART

Lk. xxiv. 32: 'Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way?'

EVERY detail of this beautiful story lives in the imagination of Christendom. Never a week passes but some earnest heart is travelling with the two down to Emmaus. We see them joined by the stranger on their journey, and then the talk turns on all that has been happening. We see the three entering the house, and sitting down to supper, where the bread is broken. Then the eyes of the two disciples are opened; they recognize that their way-fellow is Christ; and in the very moment of that recognition they glance again and He is gone. Like the followers of Cortez of whom Keats sings, they look at each other with a wild surmise; and in that moment of tumultuous excitement they speak out frankly, as in such hours men often do. 'Did not our heart burn within us, as He talked with us by the way, and opened to us the Scriptures.'

To-night, then, I wish to speak for a little of

the burning of the heart, and I desire to treat it in this way. First, it has been one of the distinctive marks of Christianity that it has caused this burning of the heart. Second, the gospel has ever made the heart burn in the same way as Christ did here.

First, then, it has been one distinctive mark of Christianity that it has caused this burning of the heart.

Some one—I think it was Matthew Arnold—defined religion as morality touched with emotion. In all the fulness which such words are capable of bearing, that is conspicuously true of Christianity. We know how the gospel has renovated morals, yet the gospel is far more than any moral philosophy. We know how the gospel has quickened and expanded intellect, yet the gospel is not primarily intellectual. Its deepest appeal is not to the intelligence: its deepest appeal is always to the heart. I have seen a fountain with one great central basin, and round about it a dozen little basins—and of course it is always possible to fetch water, and to fill these lesser basins separately. But the fountain was not intended to be filled so. That was not the idea in the mind of the designer. He meant the water in the central basin to rise, and well up to the brim and lap and overflow, and in that superabundance from the centre every vessel and receptacle in the

structure would be filled. It is thus that the gospel deals with human life. It does not begin with the brightening of the intellect; it begins with the burning of the heart. It touches what is deepest and truest in us by the power of a love passing the love of women; and all its influences in the world of conduct, and all its expansive action on the brain, and all the recreation of the nations, with the new ideals and aspirations of the ages, are the result of that burning of the heart.

We see this distinctive feature of the gospel very clearly in its earliest days. What most impresses us in the Acts is not the heroism nor the resource of the first preachers. It is the extraordinary way in which the gospel reached to the very centre of men's lives, and filled them, sometimes in an instant, with a glowing ardour that was rich in promise. In the dead of winter, when the frost is keen, you know how sometimes our windows get frosted over. The glass is dimmed like the fine gold of which the prophet speaks, and ceases to be transparent through its frosted veil. We cannot see the figures in the streets, nor the trees in their beauty of ten thousand diamonds, nor the infinite depths of the cloudless winter sky—they are all hidden from us by that icy covering. Now, it is possible for a child to take his knife, and doggedly and steadily to

scrape that frost away; but there is a simpler and surer and quicker way than that. Kindle the fire; set wood and coals a-burning; heighten the temperature of the room within the window, and in an hour the warmth will achieve for you what a whole day's rasping never would accomplish. It was the dead of winter when the gospel came, and men were trying to scrape away the frost. Every honest effort that was being made to lead mankind to better and nobler things was like the child with his knife upon the pane. Then Christ, through His love and sacrifice, kindled the fire—heightened the temperature of the secret and mystical chamber—and the frost melted with incredible speed, and men recognized their brother in the streets, and nature was clothed in unexpected glory, and in the depths of heaven there was home. All that forces itself on us in the Book of Acts. That book is like the most valiant human lives: there is no glitter in it, but abundant glow. From the day of Pentecost with its tongues of fire, we hear as it were the echo of our text, 'Did not our heart burn within us?'

It has been noted by Professor Lecky in his work on the 'History of European Morals,' that one great change has come over the moral temper of Europe. That change may be summed up in a word by saying that the emotions and the affec-

tions—in a word the heart—have won a recognition for themselves in modern life, which they never gained in the life of the old world. We all have some idea of what a Stoic was: we know how jealously he repressed all emotion; and though perhaps we are apt to overdraw the picture (for the human heart is always too big and strong to be effectively fettered by any iron creed), yet the fact remains that in the old pagan world the burning of the heart was not distinctive. It was not the virtues of the heart that were applauded; it was the virtues of the judgment and the will. To-day as the very crown of all the virtues there stands love; but in the old world love was not a grace—it was an appetite. To-day to be tender-hearted is a noble thing; but then to be tender was to be reckoned weak. To-day it is a mark of the highest manhood to be pitiful; but in the eyes of the stoic, pity was a vice. Compare the cold severity of Grecian statuary with the warmth and tenderness of Raphael's Madonnas; contrast the lot of woman in antiquity with the honour and glory of womanhood to-day, and you will feel that some power has been at work shifting the accent of the moral life. Somehow into the life of Europe there has come a recognition of the heart. Pity and tenderness and love and charity have won a hearing for themselves at last. The heart has been touched and has begun to

burn; and it is the gospel of Christ Jesus that has done it.

I think, too, that in this burning of the heart lies the great secret of Christian progress. A gospel that carries this power in its message has little need of any other aid. Mohammed conquered, but Mohammed used the sword, and without the sword he would have made little progress. And Buddha conquered—he won thousands of followers—but the message of Buddha never kindled anybody. It lulled men to rest with dreams of infinite quietude, and with the hopes of Nirvana where they should cease to feel. But there is something more inspiring than quietude—it is ardour, enthusiasm, animated feeling; and there is a better secret than a brandished sword: it is the secret of a burning heart. And I humbly submit that if our Lord is conquering, and if His gospel is going to be a universal gospel, it is because He has touched that spring in human life. When a man is faced by any great endeavour, it is not more light he wants, it is more heat. Kindle his heart by any ruling passion—love, anger, indignation, pity—and he will fling himself on any obstacle. The only statesmen who ever move a country are the statesmen who can set the people's heart a-burning—and that is true of the Saviour and the world. He meets men as they travel by life's way—He is meeting you

here in this church to-night—and for every battle you will have new equipment, and for every temptation the necessary strength, and nothing will be too hard for you to try, and nothing will be too sore for you to bear, if you can but say like these two going to Emmaus, 'Did not our heart burn within us as He talked with us.'

The second point I shall touch on very briefly. It is that the gospel ever makes the heart burn as Christ did here. There are two things only which I ask you to observe.

First, then, we should carefully remark that the hearts of these two men began to burn, not so much by learning what was new, as by a new interpretation of the old. These travellers were no strangers to the Scripture. They were Jews, and had read deeply in every book of it. When they were little children in their village homes, they had clambered round their father's knee on Sabbaths, and had listened to the stories of Moses and David and Daniel with the eagerness that our own young folk display. They had studied Jeremiah more intently than any of us, and they had heard it expounded in the synagogue. The scripture was a familiar book to them. And what did our Lord do when He met with them? He took the book they had studied all their lives. He turned to the pages that they

knew so well. He led them down by the old familiar texts. And in the old He showed such a depth of meaning, and in the familiar such a wealth of love, and He so irradiated the prophetic mystery and so illumined its darkness with His light, that not by what was absolutely new, but by the new interpretation of the old, their hearts began to burn within them by the way.

Does not our Saviour always act like that when He begins to make our heart burn? He does not startle us with unexpected novelties; He touches with glory what is quite familiar. It is the familiar experiences that He explains. It is the familiar cravings that He satisfies. It is the familiar thoughts which have filled the mind since childhood that he expands into undreamed of fulness. We have known what sin was since we were at school. Christ meets us and talks about our sin—and we learn that sin is more exceedingly sinful than we had ever thought in our most reproachful moments; we learn, too, that He died that we might be forgiven, and that there is pardon for our worst, this very hour. We have known what pain was and we have known what death was, and we have known that there was a heaven and a God; but when Christ meets us as we travel by the way and talks to us of these familiar things, there is such promise

and light and love about them all, that everything becomes new. That is the first secret of the burning heart—nothing new or startling or revolutionary—but the life we are living, and the sin we are sinning, and the death we shall die, and the God we shall all meet, set in the light of a love that is unfathomable, and interpreted through the consciousness of Jesus.

But after all what set their heart a-burning was not the mere word of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was the Christ who was behind the word. It was their immediate contact with that personality, and the mysterious outflow of His life upon them, which stirred them, as only personality can do, and moved their nature to its very depths. I remember two experiences that illustrate this, the one from literature and the other from history. When the essayist Hazlitt was a young man at home, his mind was dull and his faculties unawakened. But in one of those charming essays that he calls 'Wintersloe,' he narrates how the poet Coleridge came to see his father, and young Hazlitt walked several miles home with him. Hazlitt tells, in his own eager and eloquent way, all that the walk with Coleridge meant for him. It quickened his intellect, gave him a new world, put a new radiance into the sunset for him, and a new note into the song of every bird. His heart began to burn,

and it was not the talk that did it: it was the poet who was behind the talk. The other instance is from the life of Napoleon. You will find it in Lord Rosebery's book 'The Last Phase.' Napoleon was beaten, his great career was ended; he was a prisoner on St Helena. Yet 'every one,' said the French commissioner Montchenu, 'every one who has an audience of Napoleon leaves him in a state of most intense enthusiasm.' Their hearts began to burn, and it was not the talk that did it—it was the titanic man behind the talk. Dimly, then, and very imperfectly, such instances help us to understand our passage. It was immediate contact with a living Person—true poet, yet captain of the armies of the universe; it was immediate contact with the Lord Jesus Christ that made their hearts burn as they journeyed to Emmaus.

Need I tell you who have been bred in Christian Scotland that it has been the same in all the ages? The ardour of Christendom, its life and its enthusiasm, its countless efforts, its unwearied service—all that is rooted, not in any creed, but in the immediate presence of a living Christ. Why are men toiling in our slums to-night? Why are our sisters preaching in the heart of India, and living and suffering in central Africa? Why are men resolutely spurning what is base, and clinging to all that is pure and all that is noble? Ask them

and they will say 'Christ died for me.' There is no motive like it in the world. I beseech you to realize the love of Christ. That is the secret of the burning heart, and with the burning heart one can do anything.

XVI

THE PARTIAL EXCLUSION OF GOD

1 Kings xx. 28: 'The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys.'

ONLY a word or two is needed to explain the historical setting of our text. The Syrians were at war with Israel, and in the preceding year Israel had thoroughly beaten them; they had been routed with tremendous slaughter, and Ben-Hadad their king had barely escaped with his life. What was the cause of that terrible disaster? The Syrians made a shrewd and likely guess at it. It was inexplicable unless above the Hebrew host there waved the drawn sword of the Hebrews' God. But why did the Israelites love to fight in hill-country? Why were their sacred shrines upon the hill-tops? Why did the Hebrew captives in the Syrian mills sing, 'I to the hills will lift mine eyes?' It flashed on the Syrians that in some mysterious way this Hebrew God was associated with the mountains. So they said, The Lord is God of the hills, and not God of the valleys; if we fight in the valleys we are sure to conquer.

But we all know what a tragic mistake that was, and how in the valley they were utterly defeated.

Such, then, is the historical setting of the text, and now I ask you to follow me while I explore its depths: First, there are scenes with which we naturally associate God; Second, we are often blind to God just where He is most active; Third, to exclude God always spells disaster.

First, then, there are scenes with which we naturally associate God; and how true that was of the Syrians a glance will show us. It was among the hills that Israel fought with them; it was on the rough hillsides that Israel conquered. Now had the opposing armies been pretty equally matched no thought of the divine might have penetrated Syria. They might have said it was a fair field and no favour, and they had been beaten by the chance of war. But always in the battles which Israel won there was something that suggested the divine; there were features so astounding that these heathen hearts were hushed into a sense that God was there; until at last for the rank and file of Syria, these rocky and ragged and wild-uprising hills, where the trumpet had sounded and their brothers had fallen, and their banners had been trailed and trampled in the dust, became almost inevitably a scene with which they naturally associated God.

For us, too, no less than for the Syrians there is a

suggestion of God about the hills. That heart must be cold as a stone which has never sung with David, 'I to the hills will lift mine eyes.' It was on a hill that the God of Israel, in the wilderness, gave to Moses the tables of the law. It was on a hill that our Saviour blessed the world with the priceless teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. On a hill-top Jesus was transfigured till His garments shone so that no fuller on earth could white them. And on a hill-top, having said farewell, He ascended to the mansions of His Father. Somehow, right through the Bible story there clings to the hills the thought of the divine. Somehow, though the whole earth be God's, the Bible gives the hills a double blessing. There are scenes, then, which every Scripture student naturally associates with God.

What the Syrians felt, and what the Bible witnesses, we, too, after all lapse of time acknowledge. For the mountains do not only speak to us of freedom, they whisper to every listening heart of the divine. I know not if it be their towering summits lifting themselves heavenward above our fret and stir, or the way in which they anticipate the dawn and at sunset are still bright when all the plains are dark; I know not if it be their infinite solitudes, or their distances that stretch into the mist, or the wildness which all the ages have not smoothed, or the feeling they create

of being fixed and steadfast; but certain it is that in dwellers among the hills there is begotten a reverence and a sense of the unseen which draw the heart to the threshold of God's throne. Our Highlanders are somewhat in disfavour at this hour. We think of them as dour and stubborn and intractable. That is the fault of their leaders, not their own. Highlanders love to be loyal and they have been badly led. But Highland piety at its best, as some of us have seen it, is one of the most exquisite flowers in all the Spirit's garden; it is so tender, so reverent, so full of awe; so touched with the sense of a holy and sovereign God. The Bible is in that; the mountains are in that. In a very deep way the Lord is God of the hills. Instinctively, then, and naturally—we know not how—there are scenes which we associate with God.

As it is with nature so is it with our lives, for they, too, have got their hill-tops mystical. There are great hours when we rise above ourselves, and in such hours God is not far away. A soldier may be a very godless man, and in the round of barrack-life he may never bow the knee; but on the morning of the desperate engagement, when there is common prayer as there was on the field of Bannockburn, I think that the hardest heart in all the ranks is touched with some dim sense of the invisible. Why does a man when he sees some awful accident cry out almost involun-

tarily 'My God?' It is not an oath, nor is it a word of custom, it is the heart so mightily moved that God is there. For just as the fierce north wind catches the clouds and drives them apart till through the gap we see the sun; so our great sorrows and joys and passions and despairs scatter the clinging mists and show us God. That is why at marriages and deaths the first thing that we do is to have prayer. That is why when a young man is leaving for a distant country a minister will ask him to kneel down for a moment. It is not an impertinence, it is not an intrusion, it is the recognition that in great hours God is there. When Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain the people, we read, immediately glorified God. When Job had his goods and his children swept away from him, immediately 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away,' he cried. And with us, too, when the great moments come, of action, of change, of gladness or of cross-bearing, when we stand on the mountain-summits of our life, it may be in sunshine or in the driving mist, somehow the hour is a religious hour, and we seem to be nearer the eternal things, and we know far more truly than the Syrians knew it, that the Lord is God of the hills.

But I pass on now, and in the second place: we are often blind to God just where He is most active.

You see at once how true that was of the Syrians. 'The Lord is God of the hills,' they said, 'but He is not God of the valleys.' They limited the divine to what was upland, but they rigidly barred Him out of the low country. But where does the corn grow that gives man his sustenance? Is it high up on the hills near the eternal snow? And where do the vines cluster and bear their fruit? Is it amid the crags where the keen winds go whistling? The corn and the vine and all that makes life glad are spread by God over the valley land. There, too, men build their villages and towns, children are born there, the arts and commerce flourish; and in every heart that beats and in every hand that toils and in every brain that thinks God is a-working. Yet the Syrians said, The Lord is God of the hills, yet He is not God of the valleys. They were excluding God, then, from the spheres that were strewn all over with His handiwork. They saw Him on the wild and storm-swept hills; but not in the tenanted and fertile valleys. They denied the infinite in its sweetest revelation, and were blind to God just where He was most active.

Perhaps we are all in danger of that sin, as the Syrians were, even in regard to nature. There are certain set places we can admire enthusiastically, but to all the rest of God's world we are half-blind. We go to see Niagara and we say,

'This is stupendous'—in the roaring cataract we cannot but think of God. The Lord is God then of Niagara; but not of the one stripped beech-tree at our door. The man who can see hardly needs to go abroad. The wonder and bloom of the world are at his hand. Always distrust the man who raves about the Rhine and does not know the views within five miles of Glasgow. It is all here, had we but eyes to see it—Niagara, Rhine, sunset and evening star; for the thought is everything, and in the meanest flower that blows there are 'thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.'

But perhaps our great danger lies in ignoring God in the valley-land of common life. Not wittingly but unconsciously we are all tempted to exclude God from the quiet of routine. He is God of the hills, *that* we all admit; in the great moments, as we have seen, we feel His nearness; but in the uneventful and immemorial days, when there is nothing great to bear or to enjoy, how dim becomes our sense of the divine! Every Israelite at the Red Sea felt that his God was there. As the waters parted, they said, 'This is heaven's handiwork.' But morning by morning in front of their weary feet was another patch of desolated land, until at last, though the pillar of fire was there, they came to ignore the presence of Jehovah. It is far easier to see God upon the hills

than to discern His presence in the valleys. It is far easier to see Him in the crisis, than to detect His goings in our common days. Yet He is never nearer than in these simple duties that meet us every morning when we rise, in these common joys that consecrate our homes, in these common burdens that we all must bear. I could tell you that Paul was a saint by this one fact that he prayed to God three times about a thorn. Any of us might pray about a sword-thrust, but few of us would think of praying about a thorn. Yet Paul did that for his God was God of the valleys; He had come down from the hill-tops into life's common round. However it be with us, Paul had been wakened to see God where He was most active.

Thirdly, and in a word, to exclude God always spells disaster.

That it was so with the Syrians you know quite well. They were routed and beaten because they excluded God. Now I would strike out Syrians from the story, and in the place of Syrians write myself. Shut out the light from plants, and will they flourish? God is light. Shut out love from the heart and will it ever be strong? God is love. So by the very names of God we learn the folly of trying to work and live and suffer and die without Him. To exclude God always spells disaster, in friendship and home and state, even in

business: and the more a man prospers in a godless business, the worse is the disaster in the eyes of heaven. Exclude God altogether if you will. But do not give Him the hills and keep the valleys. That did not save the Syrians in the battle, and it will not keep you and me from being lost. Rather, to-night, touched by His Holy Spirit, yield yourself up to Him in full surrender. Give Him the hills, for they are His—He claims them; but let His feet rest in the valleys too.

XVII

THE DOCTRINE OF DELAYS

Lk. xviii. 4: 'He would not for a while.'

THIS parable, as the Scripture itself tells us, was meant to teach us importunity in prayer. Christ, who was tempted in all points like as we are, and who had wrestled through many a stern hour of intercession, knew well how the heart is prone to faint when the heavens we pray to are as brass. The judge in this parable is a venal and villainous creature, the kind of man who is still the curse of the East; and any one but Christ might well have hesitated to compare his actions with those of the Almighty. But a son can take large liberties sometimes: he will run the risk of being misunderstood. I know no parable that so assures me of the perfect freedom that Christ had with His Father; a servile courtier would not have dared to speak so. Love can be very silent and yet happy: but love has the boldest and the bravest of all tongues. There are hours when only love dares to say nothing. There are hours when only love dares to say everything.

So to our text then, 'He would not for a while': that is to say, this judge delayed to act. And that at once suggests to me for our consideration the great problem of divine delay. It meets us everywhere and in every sphere; there is scarce one heart but has been torn and tried by it. The delays of man may be infinitely vexing, but they are nothing to the delays of God. It meets us in nature, when men may be gaunt with famine, yet God will not hurry the harvest by one hour. It meets us in life where all that a man has toiled for often reaches him seemingly just an hour too late. It meets us in judgment when wrong-doers live and flourish till the cry from the altar rings in heaven, 'How long?' Above all, it meets us in the sphere of prayer. How many patriots have prayed for their country's weal, yet the years rolled on, and there was no arm to save. How many mothers have prayed for their sons or daughters, and been well-nigh broken-hearted by delay. What a world of experience there is, and how the centuries vanish, when we hear the cry of the psalmist, 'O God make *haste* to help us!' It is as if his faith were flickering out into its ashes, under the torment of delay.

But the very fact that the psalmist prayed that prayer shows that the problem is a very old one. And we are so knit together in this our strange humanity, so touched into strength and courage by companionship, that often just to know the world-

old pressure of a burden, gives a certain ease in our own bearing of it. Half of the bitterness of children's woes lies in the thought that they are all their own. They have no experience of life yet, their eyes are not opened; they have not learned the lesson of comparison. As we grow older, and see a little further, we find strange help in the brotherhood of trial. Now in this matter of delay it seems to me that not a few of God's people are still children. They think that God has some quarrel with them personally. They forget that the problem is as old as time. Noah felt it when he built his ark and the sun still shone in a heaven of unclouded blue. Abraham felt it when the promise of Isaac was given him, yet the summers passed and the hair of Sarah was silvered, and there was no rippling of childish laughter in his tent. David felt it—had he not been anointed to be king: yet here he was hunted as an outlaw on the hills. Paul felt it when he prayed, and prayed again, that the Lord would take away the thorn out of his flesh, yet he woke in the bright morning to his work; and for all his prayer, the thorn was with him still. Do not say, then, 'God has forgotten *me*' because the burden of delay weighs heavy on you. We are brought into the fellowship of all the saints, by what we suffer as well as by what we gain. The problems of yesterday are but as gossamer, and a breath of to-morrow's wind

will scatter them. It is the old old problems, like the old old joys, that reach the secret places of the heart.

It is well to remember, too, that the higher we rise, the more intense does the difficulty become. The very measure in which we feel its weight, is a kind of test of the things for which we seek. One summer perfects a flower in the field; but to perfect a child takes twenty or thirty years. And the very fact of the divine delay, in calling into their amplitude these childish faculties, is a proof that there is more of heaven in the child than in the most exquisite flower God ever fashioned. There are myriads of creatures who are born and dance and die in the short span of a bright July day. No one in watching *them* would ever dream of charging the Creator with delay. But a nation of men which is to serve the high ends of heaven is never fashioned hastily like that. Through pilgrimage and war and struggle and blood and tears, by heroism that oft seems unavailing and sacrifice that is like water spilt, it becomes the polished instrument of God. Delay, then, tends to become more marked, the higher you rise in the Creator's purposes. Great delays in the mystery of providence are the highway for the chariot of great blessing. The joy that cometh in the morning might be far less thrilling, had not the weeping from which it springs endured all night.

We see this very clearly in the raising of Lazarus—that tenderest and most touching of all miracles. When Lazarus was ill—when his state had become critical—Martha and Mary, you remember, sent word to Jesus. Now Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, and the happiest memories encircled that village home; yet the gospel tells us that when Jesus heard the news, He abode two days still in the place where He was. There are seasons when two days seems like a moment: there are seasons when two days seems an eternity. When a life is in the balance half-an-hour is endless; twice four-and-twenty hours is unbearable. What did it mean? Had Jesus quite forgotten them? Was He deaf and dead to the prayers of the sisters' love? I think that Martha and Mary, with their eyes on dying Lazarus, knew the burden of divine delay. They knew its burden then; they know its meaning now. They see it irradiated with purpose and with wisdom. A little boon might have been granted instantly, but the great actions of God have tardy wheels. The greater and richer the blessing that we pray for, the more must we reckon on the delays of God.

Nor should we forget—for this is very important—what I might call the moral training of delay. Did we get everything we craved for in the very hour of asking it, I think it would be

a long farewell to manhood. The one sure way to ruin a young child is to give it immediately all for which it asks ; and to the Ancient of days, whose hairs are white as snow, I fancy the oldest here are but as little children. Think of Christ's treatment of the Syrophœnician woman when she came to Him praying for her daughter. All her motherhood was on her lips and in her eyes as she pled and interceded for her child. Do you think it was cruel of Christ to answer her never a word? Do you think it was harsh to speak about the dogs? How much we should have missed, and how much Christ Himself would have missed, had it not been for that practice of delay! It was that which called out in her her fine persistence : her faith, her wit, all that was brightest in her. She might have been anybody when she began, but she was a woman among women when she ended. And many a person has begun by being anybody, and ended by being a woman among women, because they were kept praying and pleading long for something that was to be granted by and bye. Work reveals character, but so does waiting Waiting shows the baby or the man. We need to be tested to prove if we be worthy just to receive and use the thing we crave. So it often is that God delays, and will not answer us, and keeps us waiting. It is not in scorn, but in the wisest love, that He will not for a while.

Then it is very helpful to remember that divine delay does not mean inactivity. God is not idle when He does not answer us; He is busier preparing the answer than we think. There have been men of genius who could only work irregularly: for long periods they seemed to do nothing at all. Then suddenly, and as if by inspiration, their powers took fire and they wrought at a white heat. You may be sure of it that the periods in between were not so idle as the world considered them. By thought, by reading, by communion with glad nature, half unconsciously they were preparing for their work. And when the kindling came, and the fire burned within them, when they were divinely swept into utterance or action, they owed far more than we should ever guess to the silent preparation of delay. As it is with men of genius, so with God, only in loftier and nobler ways. His delays are not the delays of inactivity. They are the delays of preparation. In an instant the tropical storm may burst and break, yet for weeks—unseen—the storm has been preparing. The sunshine of May comes, and all the world is green, yet on God's loom of January that robe was being spun. And the morning breaks when at last some prayer is answered, and the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose, yet the answer was being fashioned in these very years when we said there was no eye to pity and no arm to save. It takes a million of years

to harden the ruby, says the poet, yet through all the years the hardening goes on. It takes a century for the sea to wear away one cliff, yet every night when we sleep the breakers dash on it. So when we pray and strive and nothing happens, till we are tempted to say 'God does not know, God does not care,' who can tell but that, behind the veil, infinite love may be toiling like the sea, to give us in the full time our heart's desire? 'My Father worketh hitherto and I work.' It is a mysterious word of the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps God, like some of the busiest men I know, is doing most when He seems to be doing nothing.

And so in closing I would say to you to-night: do not lose heart at the delays of God. Speed, after all, is but a relative term, and there is more love in God's slow method than you think. I was staying the other week with some friends in Ireland, when word came that our friend's place of business had been broken into. It was a holiday and he was away in Galway, and was not to be home again until that evening. Well, he came home, very fagged and famishing, and a foolish wife would have rushed out to meet him with the news; but his wife was not foolish, she was Scotch and sensible, and she let him wash and eat and rest himself a little; and then when he was ready to see things rightly she broke the news, and I say there was wisdom and love in that delay. You who are

mothers here, and who look back on those sweet years when your innocent children played about your feet: had you never some great news to tell your children, yet you deliberately withheld it for a time? 'If we tell them to-night there will not be one wink of sleep; If we tell them when they waken, there will not be one bite of breakfast'; and so deliberately you held back the blessing, and you did it just because you loved them so. If ye then being evil, act like that, is it incredible that God should do the same? Is it fair to distrust our Father, to say He has no pity, to charge the heavens with being brass above us? I think it is wiser to pray on, strive on, casting all doubts to the devil who inspired them; believing in a love that never mocks us, and that will give us our heart's desire in His own time.

XVIII

NOT WORTH WHILE

THERE is an expression which we sometimes use —an expression which I have sometimes thought must puzzle the foreigner—and that expression is 'not worth while.' We say of certain things which we have the opportunity of doing, or of certain vexations which are likely to overtake us, 'O it is not worth while doing that, or troubling over that;' and we imply that we are all given occasionally to an expenditure of nervous or of moral energy out of proportion to the actual circumstances. Now it is very important that we should clearly grasp the kind of thing which is really worth while. I take it that the apostle just meant that when he said, Covet earnestly the *best* gifts. It is to some thoughts associated with that theme that I ask your attention for a few moments.

Now if any man will take up his Bible, and quietly study it as a living book, he cannot fail to remark, perhaps with surprise, how often human estimates are overturned in it; nor to note how

frequently it is the things that do not seem worth while to men, which are of value in the eyes of God.

There is, for example, that memorable incident when Samuel went to the house of Jesse to anoint a king; and Jesse made son after son pass before Samuel—Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah and the rest—and yet no sign came from the prophet's God that among these was the future monarch of the realm. Then Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And Jesse said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold he keepeth the sheep. He was only a shepherd-lad, out with the sheep at pasture. It had not seemed worth while to summon him. Yet the very lad whom it was not worth while calling, was the elect of God and Christ's progenitor.

Another familiar instance we may find in Naaman, that mighty man of valour but a leper. We have known from our childhood how he came to Elisha at the instance of the little captive maiden, to be cured of the leprosy which was his curse. Elisha bade him go and wash in Jordan, and then we read that Naaman was wroth. Were there not rivers at home he might have washed in—Abana and Pharphar, 'the drink of none but kings?' It was not worth his while to have made the journey, when his master had such urgent need of him, if this paltry washing were the end

of it. Yet we know what happened when he obeyed the prophet—his flesh came to him again like the flesh of a little child. The act that seemed to Naaman not worth while, was the most blessed thing he ever did.

Nor is it only in the Old Testament that such instances so frequently recur. There is not a book in the New Testament but indicates some similar reversals. Let me only recall to you that day at Athens when Paul stood in the midst of Mar's hill, and preached, and his audience listened to him with a certain satisfaction while he quoted their poets and discoursed on God. Then he touched on the resurrection of the dead, and they were not angry—it were better if they had been. They had lost the divine art of being angry, and it is a bad sign when a people loses that. Some mocked; others said we shall hear thee again of this matter. It was not worth while troubling any more that day. And the very truth to which they were so indifferent, which they dismissed so lightly like the latest jest, was the truth that has since inspired ten thousand hearts, and dried the weeping of ten thousand eyes. Will you learn, then, out of God's Word, how cautious we should be in saying, Not worth while? There may be commands like Elisha's that seem not worth while obeying; there may be words like Paul's that

merely that it has revealed the best and highest, but that it has made the best and highest seem worth while. How has it done so? I shall suggest three truths that have given to the world this moral stimulus.

The first is the great truth of Christian brotherhood, and I might illustrate what I mean from the field of science. Here is a German man of science, let me say, toiling with true Teutonic assiduity at some subject that seems to us infinitely little. He gives all his manhood to it till his locks are silvered, and the world and the spring and the summer call to him in vain, and at the end there issues from the press a bulky treatise, which fifty shall read, perhaps, and twenty understand, and we whisper to ourselves, Was it worth while? But then some day there comes a man of genius—a Helmholtz, a Marconi, a Lord Kelvin—and the world is startled by some brilliant discovery that will powerfully affect all civilization; but when men applaud them they reply, Do not praise *us*: our work would have been impossible but for that German student. There is a brotherhood in all research that makes the unlikeliest labours worth while in the end; and one of the values of our Christian brotherhood is that it carries that truth into the world of morals. We are not isolated when we strive and fail. We are not alone when we hold fast to the highest. Somehow, in God's

mysterious providence, we write a page then that makes it possible for others to do better. It is because Christ insists upon this brotherhood that much which once seemed vain, has come to be reckoned by the Christian as worth while.

The second truth is the friendship of Christ Jesus—you will easily see the power of that motive. To gain such a friend and keep His friendship makes a thousand things worth while immediately. If it is worth while journeying to Stratford, just to see the house where Shakespeare lived; if it is worth while travelling to Germany just to follow in the footsteps of Luther, do you not feel what efforts grow worth while when the end to be gained is the comradeship of Jesus? I know no period in European history more full of gallant endeavour than the Crusades, when men left home and wives and children and the green lanes of England, to suffer incredible hardships in the East. They thought it well worth while to bear all that, that they might win from the Infidel the tomb of Christ—but *we* seek not His sepulchre but Himself. Precept is hard and dogma is severe; the law is stern and makes our best seem vanity. But when the controlling and dominating force is friendship, and a friendship so exquisitely glorious as Christ's; when we know that every effort and every sacrifice, every temptation mastered and every passion

subdued, leads us a little further into the riches of that most inspiring and wonderful of fellowships, how amply worth while it all becomes! Does that friendship mean anything to you? The moral value of it is incalculable.

The third truth that has made moral effort seem worth while is the Christian doctrine of immortality. It is the assurance given us by Jesus that moral activity does not cease at death. I am aware that there have been great and noble men who have denied the need of personal survival. They have said it was possible to kindle and rouse the world without any trumpet-call of immortality. But I believe that if you take out of the world that glowing hope of the future which is Christ's, in that very hour you rob ten thousand men of the deep hope which makes their best worth while. If death ends all, I struggle in the dark. My life becomes a thing of shreds and patches. If death ends all 'were it not better done, as others use, To sport with Amaryllis in the shade?' But if death be a passage to a larger life then it is worth while rising after a hundred failures; for beyond the veil where Christ and the angels are, the broken music shall be a song at last.

XIX

THE VIRTUE OF FORBEARANCE

Col. iii. 13 : 'Forbearing one another.'

If a man is to live with any joy and fulness, and to find what a noble abode this world may prove, there are three virtues which he must steadily pursue. The first is faith in God, for without faith existence will always be a tangled skein; the second is courage, for every life has its hills and we breast them but poorly if our heart is faint; and the third is forbearance—forbearing one another. It is on forbearance, then, that I desire to speak, and I propose to gather up what I wish to say in this way. First, I shall touch on some of the evils of the unforbearing spirit. Second, I shall indicate the character of true forbearance. Then I shall suggest some thoughts to make us more forbearing.

First, then, some of the evils of the unforbearing spirit; and one of the first of them to arrest me is that it makes life a constant disappointment. I have often wondered that there is no trace of disappointment in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You may call Him a despised man if you will, but you could never call Him a disappointed man. He came to His own and His own received Him not; they laughed Him to scorn and then they crucified Him; yet when He entered the glory, and saw His Father's face, do you think He said, 'Father, it has been a tragic disappointment?' For all its sorrow, life was not *that* to Christ: it was full and fresh and dew-touched to the close; and one of the sources of that unfailing freshness was our Saviour's knowledge of the secret of forbearance. Jesus expected great things from humanity. Jesus never expected the impossible. I like to think that He who made the heavens, was ready when the hour came to make allowances. Depend upon it that if we expect the impossible we are doomed to the disappointment which is worse than death. There is only one highway to the world's true comradeship—it is the road of forbearing one another.

Another evil of the unforbearing spirit is this, that it presses hardest on life's tenderest relationships. It becomes powerful for evil in that very region where ties are most delicate and life most sweet. There are some worms that are content to gnaw green leaves, and to spend their lives on the branches of the tree. But there are others that are never satisfied with leaves, they must eat their way into the red heart of the rose. That

is the curse of the unforbearing spirit—it gnaws at the very heart of the rose of life. It is comparatively easy to be forbearing with those whom we rarely meet and whom we hardly know. We are all tolerant of those who lightly touch us. But it is with those whom we meet and among whom we mingle daily, who share the same home with us, who live with us and love us—it is with those that it is often hardest to forbear, and it is on those that the sorrow of unforbearance falls. There are ministers who can speak well of every congregation, except the one which they have been called to serve. There are husbands who are gentle to everybody's faults, excepting to the faults of their own wives. And it is just because unforbearance has a greater scope in proportion as life's ties grow tenderer and dearer, that the gospel of love insists so urgently on the duty of forbearing one another.

But there is another evil of the unforbearing temper—it reacts with certainty upon the man himself. For with what judgment we judge we shall be judged, and with what measure we mete it shall be measured unto us. If we are intolerant, we become intolerable. If we never make allowances for anybody, God knows the scant allowance that we get. Just think of the Pharisees a moment. Their crowning vice was that they were unforbearing. There was not a

little that was good in many Pharisees, but they were harsh and censorious and exacting—need I remind you of the vials of stern judgment that were poured on the Pharisees by Jesus Christ? Let that suffice for the evils of unforbearance. It makes life one constant disappointment. It presses hardest on life's tenderest ties. It reacts inevitably on the man himself.

In the second place I wish to indicate the character of true forbearance, and it is urgently important that we should pay heed to this. For the devil has got his counterfeit of every grace, and a counterfeit grace is sometimes worse than sin.

The first thing that I would say about it is that true forbearance begins in a man's thought. It is a good thing to be forbearing in our acts, a great thing to be so in our speech, yet I question if we have begun to practise rightly this pre-eminently Christian virtue, till we are habitually forbearing in our thought. 'Master,' said the disciples, 'shall we call down fire on these villages? they would not receive us: shall we clear them away like Sodom?' And it was not quite for their *words* that Christ rebuked them—ye know not what *spirit* ye are of. Ah! if our bitter and unforbearing words flashed into utterance without any thought, they would not wound so, nor would they leave these scars that the kindnesses

of weeks cannot efface. It is because they so often betray the unforbearing thoughts that have been harboured in secret and cherished in the dark, that the bite of them is like a serpent's tooth. We talk of a hasty word, but a hasty word might mean little if it were only the out-flash of a hasty thought. What a hasty word often implies is this: that in secret we have been putting the worst construction upon things; then comes the moment of temper when the tongue is loosened, and we never meant to utter what we thought, but it escapes us—only a hasty word—yet the bitter thoughts of a fortnight may be in it. True forbearance begins in a man's thought.

Again true forbearance is independent of our moods. It does not vary with our varying temper. It is a mock forbearance that comes and goes with every variation in the day. There are times when it is very easy to be forbearing. When things have gone well with us, when we are feeling strong, or when some great happiness has touched our hearts—it is not difficult to be forbearing then. When we are in a good humour with ourselves, we can be in a good humour with everybody. But true forbearance is not a passing gleam, nor is it the child of a happy mood or temper; it does not depend on the state of a man's health, or on whether or not he has had a good day at business. It is a virtue to be loyally practised for Christ's sake what-

ever our mood or disappointment be. I should not have wondered much if Christ had been forbearing when He rode in triumph into Jerusalem. Amid the cries of Hosanna and the strewing of the palm branches it might have been easy to take kindly views. But when His face was marred more than any man's, when they were looking on Him whom they had pierced, when the nails were torture and when the cross was agony, was it not supremely hard to be forbearing then? Yet it was then that the Redeemer prayed 'Father forgive them, they know not what they do.' Forbearance must not vanish when we suffer.

There is one other mark on which I would insist, and it is this, that true forbearance helps to better things. It is like the sunshine which brings the summer nearer; it is part of that gentleness which makes men great. There is a certain lenient indulgence that is the very antipodes of this great virtue. There is a soft and easy way of smiling at all sin that may send a man to the devil double-speed. Such leniency is the leniency of Antichrist. Christian forbearance never makes light of sin; it never oils the wheels of Satan's chariot; it can be stern, it whets its glittering sword; if a man is a scoundrel it can tell him so. But it never despairs, never passes final judgments, sees possibilities, touches the chord of brotherhood, until a man feels that someone believes in him, and

sometimes it is heaven to feel that. One day they dragged a poor woman before Christ, and the Jews would have stoned her, for she was taken in sin. But Jesus said 'Neither do I condemn thee—go and sin no more,' and I am certain she never so sinned again. Peter was saved by the forbearance of Christ Jesus—'and the Lord turned and looked on Peter.' Thomas was saved by the forbearance of Christ Jesus—'reach hither thine hand, thou doubter, let Me not scold thee.' The forbearance of Christ was a great moral power, and all Christian forbearance must share the same prerogative.

Then lastly let me suggest some thoughts that may help to make us more forbearing.

First think how little we know of one another. We know far too little to be censorious or harsh. One secret of the perfect gentleness of Christ is His perfect knowledge of everyone He met. I suppose that most of us have known some man whom for years, perhaps, we used to judge unkindly. We never liked him and our thoughts of him were bitter. Then one day we learned the story of his life, and we found that long ago when the heavens were blue above him, there had fallen on his life some crushing blow; and we say 'Ah! if we had only known that story, we should never have judged the man as we have done.' It is well to remember how ignorant we are when we are

tempted to be unforbearing. There may have been something in the upbringing that would explain a score of things if we but knew it. There may have been elements that made the temptation awful, yet how we jested and sneered when some one fell! Forbearing one another — because of life's complexity; because we cannot see, because we do not know; because only God can tell the million threads that are woven into the tapestry of being. Our very dearest are such strangers to us that it is always wisest to forbear.

Next think how greatly we ourselves need forbearance. Even if we do not give it, we all want it. I suppose we all irritate and alienate other people a thousand times oftener than we ever dream of. If other people are doing so to us, it is but reasonable to think we are doing so to them. Never a sun sets but a man feels how easily he might have been misjudged that day. Never a morning breaks but a man knows that he will make demands on the forbearance of the world. We need forbearance, then let us give forbearance. We need to be kindly judged, then let us judge so. Let us forbear one another because of our own great need.

Lastly think how God has forborne us. The forbearance of God is a perpetual wonder. He has been willing that men should taunt Him with being idle, and He has been willing that men should

say He did not care, rather than that He should seem an unforbearing God. Is there no secret passage in your life which being trumpeted abroad would quite have ruined you? God in His mercy has never blown that trumpet-blast, and His long-suffering has been your salvation. Then we are such poor scholars in His school; we are so backward and so soon turned aside; we make so little progress in His teaching, and are so keen about everything save Him—surely there is no forbearance in the world like the forbearance of our heavenly Father. It is a great example: shall we not copy it? We can start again at home this very night. Days will be golden, and silenced birds will sing, when we revive the grace of forbearing one another.

XX

FORBIDDEN SERVICE

1 Chron. xxii. 5: 'And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death.'

THE thought of a Temple, like many another noble thought, sprang from a deep sense of gratitude. David had numbered the people against the will of God, and a devastating pestilence had swept over the country, until the angel of destruction in his deadly progress stood over the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. Here by the command of heaven his hand was stayed; on this spot David was bidden build an altar; and it reveals the generosity of David, and the large-hearted enthusiasm of the man, that on receiving the command to build an altar, his mind immediately conceived a Temple. There are men who take life at its narrowest dimensions. Their perpetual thought is how little will suffice. But saints and heroes are of another mould; their question is not how little but how much. They take life at its largest and

its best, and expand it into uncommanded meanings. So David did, and God through the prophet said to him, 'It was good that it was in thine heart;' but for all that, David was prohibited from building the Temple on which his heart was set. Solomon would build it and it would be Solomon's Temple. It would not rise majestic till David was in his grave. And it was then when death was not far away that David uttered the brave words of our text.

Now I shall ask you to note with me these three truths in our verse. First, There is a disabling power in our bypast sins. Second, We must have lofty estimates of what we undertake. Third, The truest service may be unrecognized.

First, then, there is a disabling power in our bypast sins, and of no life in Scripture is that more sadly true than of the life of this great saint and hero. David was a conspicuously successful man; no one would dream of calling his life a failure. He had risen from shepherding to be the King of Israel, and his services to Israel were incalculable. But spite of all his success his hands were stained with blood—as the blood of Duncan was on the hand of Lady Macbeth, so the blood of Uriah was on the hand of David—and he was forbidden to build this Temple to the Lord, because as God told him he had shed blood abundantly. The plan that was to crown his life was frustrated because of the sin of a long bypast day. It was

forgiven long since—all blotted out in heaven—yet it made the Temple impossible for David. He was disabled in his most generous hour, when the greatest service in his life loomed up before him, by the strange power of his bypast sin.

To show you that this is not exceptional in Scripture, I might ask you to turn for a moment to the case of Moses. No one would dare to say that Moses was a failure any more than they would dare to say it of David. A master of all the wisdom of the Egyptians; a high-souled patriot if ever this world has seen one; brave, loyal, reverent and meek, Moses is one of the noblest men of history. Yet he too sinned as David the king had sinned—not a sin of blood, but of murmuring and impatience. And his sin, like the sin of David, was forgiven—cleansed in the blood of Christ who was to come. Yet the crown of all his service was denied him, and he never set foot in the Canaan of his hopes—and the power that barred his entrance was his sin. His eye was not dim nor his natural force abated when he died in Pisgah outside the Promised Land; his had been a splendid and a successful life, fought out in the teeth of overwhelming difficulties; but the last chord was lacking in the music, and the day of consummation never dawned for Moses; he was disabled by one thing and one thing only, by the abiding power of his bypast sin.

We all know far too well how sin can make

utter ruin of a life. We have only to walk with open eyes through a great city to see the havoc and misery of evil. But the story of David's life is not the story of a life that went down to the night in wreck and ruin. It is the story of what the best of men may forfeit because of a time when they neglected God. Here is a son in a good and Christian home, who makes light of the precious influences there; and then he goes out into the world and prospers, and we call him a successful man. The sin of his careless youth is all forgiven him as the sin of David had been long ago; but the world will never be quite so great to him as if he had been nobly influenced when his heart was tender. Here is a student who is wasting the golden hours when he ought to be deep in his books and in his studies; and the day is coming when he will repent of his folly, and turn with all his heart to his life's work. With some measure of success he will succeed, and men will say of him, He is a changed man now; but he will be hampered and hindered at every turn and tide by the wasted and irrevocable past. I have known so many men who have done tolerably, who might have built temples but for some bypast sin. There are physical consequences of certain sins which no repentance ever can annul. There are intellectual reminders of the squandered months that shall never lose their bitterness till death. And feelings may

be so blunted by one habit, and the whole outlook so demeaned and lowered, that strive as we will when twenty years are gone, we cannot rear the temple of our dreams. On some of our hillsides there are long lines of stones that to the uninstructed eye convey no meaning. But the geologist will tell you that they are moraines and that they mark where the glacier moved ten thousand years ago. So perhaps in every life are certain features which to the eye of the bystander have no significance, but which to the eye of God tell of some sin which passed down the valley in the long ago. Remember the disabling power of bypast sin. As a man soweth, so shall he also reap. A cottage is better than a hovel certainly; but if the cottage might have been a temple—ah, the pity of it!

But I pass on, and in the second place we must have lofty estimates of what we undertake—the house of the Lord, said David, must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries. David was an old man when he spoke these words, but old age had not chilled him as it so often does. It had not made him cynical nor selfish, as if there were nothing worth caring for but his own comfort. There is the ring of enthusiasm about his words, the note of resolve that nothing could be too splendid to be lavished on the house of the Lord of Israel; David has

this true mark of moral courage that he dared to have lofty thoughts of what he planned.

I have known people who constantly belittled their own efforts and their own part in life. When they had to speak of such things they did it so depreciatingly that you would think they were ashamed of what they did. It was 'My little meeting' or 'My poor endeavours,' or, 'Oh, it is a mere nothing that I am doing,' as if *this* were the reverent and adoring grace to which the Bible gives the name humility. Humility, said Heine, is the virtue of a hound, and no doubt it was of this mock humility that he was thinking. To be humble is never to be apologetic. The meek are not here by sufferance—the meek shall inherit the earth. There is no worse sign of a man's moral character than to take a light and laughing view of his life's task and toil. For if we are here, as I believe that we are here, to perform some service for Almighty God; if we are not tossed into our place by accident, but set there by the everlasting wisdom, then to belittle our work is to insult that wisdom, and to come perilously near to the dark sin of blasphemy. Great characters are not fashioned in that way. They have learned to hitch the waggon to the star. Their life is so penetrated with the thought of God that the lowliest duty becomes a royal thing. Others may build on the cheap, but David never will;

and he never will, because he is building for the Lord.

I want you to notice that this habit of lofty estimate is very characteristic of Christ Jesus. No man ever was so meek and lowly as the Lord, yet none ever took such sublime views of his own calling. 'A greater than Solomon is here; a greater than the Temple.' 'I am a king, to this end came I forth.' So clearly did He see that He was about His Father's business, that not to have spoken so would have been treachery. *We* are not called upon to speak so. The less we speak about ourselves the better. But deep in our hearts through the most dreary day, should burn the thought that we too are God's builders. If you are a student, do not think of study as task-work, but say to yourself, 'Through every page I read I am being fitted to play my part in the great world.' If you are a mother with all a mother's worries, say 'I am fashioning these young immortals for eternity.' If you are a servant, do not say 'I am a drudge;' say, 'Christ took upon Himself the form of a servant.' If you are a hospital-nurse, never lay hand on patient, without saying to yourself, 'He bore our sicknesses.' Are you a working man with horny hands? Never cleanse them without recalling hands that once were pierced. Are you a sufferer? You can suffer and be strong if you say, 'This is the very cup that Jesus drank.'

It is in such ways that every house we build becomes, mysteriously, a house of God.

In closing, a brief word on our third point: the truest service may be unrecognized; and a glance at the verses which precede our text will show you at once how that applies to David. For David made mighty preparations for the Temple —iron and nails, fine gold, cedars of Lebanon. Without the labours and the wealth of David the Temple would never have reached its after glory. Yet no one ever called it David's Temple; it is known in history as the Temple of Solomon, and when men came from afar to view its wonders, it was Solomon, not David, whom they praised. The truest service, that of preparation, may be unrecognized in the judgment of the world.

I remember once in Dundee hearing a speech by Marconi, the world-famed discoverer of wireless telegraphy, and as the speech of great men generally is, it was a very modest and quiet utterance. But what impressed me most was a reference he made to a Dundee toiler in the same field some forty years before, 'for,' said Marconi, 'without that man of genius my discoveries would have been impossible.' I am certain there are not five men in this church who could tell me the name of that genius by the Tay. He is utterly forgotten: no one ever thinks of him when the message flashes across a thousand miles of sea. Yet he like David,

though no men own his toil, was preparing a fame and glory for all countries.

So in closing I ask you to take this home. It is a great incentive to happy perseverance. If we cannot all do great or glorious things, at least we can all prepare the way for them. It took a score of lives of which we have not one trace to prepare for the career of Florence Nightingale. It took historian and chronicler and story-teller to prepare for the splendour and light of William Shakespeare. It took every psalmist who ever sung and suffered, and every prophet who ever toiled and failed, to prepare for the babe who was born in the inn at Bethlehem. We are not here only to perform; we are here also to prepare. There is not a good thing we do, and not a cross we bear well, but shall be of service somehow when we sleep, and help on the triumph of the best when we are dead. Let us be quiet, then, and study to do our own work, not discontented nor eager for applause, and when the Temple of all the ages is completed, and the design of God has been carried to its cope-stone, we too like David, though unrecognised, shall find that we have helped more than we knew.

XXI

THE LOOKS OF CHRIST

A RECENT writer, in discussing the effects of the scientific spirit upon literature, has taken occasion to remind us that the eye confers as well as receives. By that he means that when we look at anything, we do not merely admit the image of it to the retina; we immediately and unconsciously invest that image with some of the colours of our own thought and character. At first glance it might seem as if we were entirely passive in the act of seeing. As a matter of fact we are far from being that. There is probably not a deed we ever did but influences us in the exercise of sight. Hence is it that men may look out on the same things, yet see them in such different ways—'two men looked out of the prison bars, the one saw mud, the other stars,'—and it is because character reacts on vision so, and informs it with its own nobility or poverty; it is because all we have made ourselves and all we are, largely determines the kind of thing we see, that there is a moral value in a look.

Our Lord was very well aware of this moral element in vision. A careful study of His teaching makes that plain. For instance, 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out.' If the eye were a mere passive and helpless receiver, it is difficult to see how it could offend—not that which goeth into a man defileth him. But the eye offends and proves a stumbling-block because it is in vital touch with all we are. It is not merely an inward-leading avenue; it is the issue and outgate of the heart. Again, 'whosoever looketh on a woman'—there may be foul sin, then, even in a look. Augustine tells in his great book the 'Confessions,' of one who was taken to the gladiatorial shows. He was forced there against his will, and knowing the lust of blood that these fierce fights excited, and realising the peril to his soul in them, he determined to keep his eyes tight shut. But a mighty shout went up from the maddened audience; it was irresistible; the Christian gave one look—and the forsworn craving leaped up in his heart again, and the old pagan spirit overmastered him; he could not withdraw his eyes from the wild spectacle—a look had ruined him. The Bible knows that a look can save a man: 'Look unto Me and be ye saved.' The Bible knows that a look can ruin a man: 'whosoever looketh on a woman.' You see, then, how Scripture recognises the moral value of a look.

If this—the moral power of sight—be true of all men, we shall find it singularly true of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just because in His nature there is a depth and fulness that sets Him pre-eminent above all the sons of men, so in every look He gave we may be sure that there was a power and an appeal too deep for words. What the eyes of Christ were like we do not know—Mary Magdalene knew, but we do not —but there is one incident preserved for us by St Luke, that helps us to see how men felt their power. When Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration He was met by the man with the devil-possessed son. None of the disciples could cure the boy; but here was Jesus and all would now be well. What did the father cry—Lord *heal* my son? Lord, touch him or speak but a word and it is done? Not that, but 'Master I beseech Thee *look* upon my son for he is my only child.' Is that not a tribute to the power and virtue that men had seen in the look of Jesus Christ? I want, then, to run through the Gospel story, and direct your thought to the looks of Christ which I find there.

First, then, there is the look of *inquiry*. One day, in a densely crowded street, a woman stole up and touched the hem of Christ's garment. For twelve long weary years she had been a sufferer, but the instant she touched Christ's gar-

ment she was whole. Then she stole back into the crowd again—for a crowd conceals better than any solitude—but Jesus halted: He knew the touch of faith: 'Some one hath touched Me, virtue is gone out of Me.' The disciples, seeing how dense the throng was, said, Master it is idle to try to find who did it; and then, says Mark, Jesus looked round about to see her who had done this thing. Face after face was scanned swiftly and eagerly. The eyes drew nearer and nearer to the poor cowering woman. Then for one single instant they met hers, and she knew in a flash that she was recognised, and fearing and trembling and knowing what was done in her she came and fell down at His feet. It was the look that brought her, not the word. It was the searching look of the Master who had healed her. She discovered that there was no concealment possible from the enquiring look of Jesus Christ.

Next there is the look of *anger*; we find it in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. It occurs in the heart of that parable of grace, where the Lord heals the man with the withered hand. 'Stand forth,' said Jesus to the poor maimed brother. There was no one there but He who felt the pity of it. The rest were critical and ferret-like, malevolently watchful to see if He would heal upon the Sabbath day. And then, says Mark, He looked round on them with anger,

and said to the sufferer 'Stretch forth thine hand.' His eyes were flashing—that is the word Mark uses—His heart was burning with moral indignation. It was intolerable that men should carp and cavil when the healing mercy of God was in their midst. And if you have ever seen a Highland river as it plunges into a narrow and rocky gully, and watched it gather its waters like a heap as it swirls forward deep and irresistible, you will understand the depth, the power, the silence of the look of anger in the eyes of Christ.

There is an anger which is weak, and being weak is always ineffectual; and it is because so much of our anger is weak anger that we shrink from thinking of Jesus Christ as angry. But there is also an anger which is strong, and which is magnificent in self-control. Self is effaced from it, it is not rooted in petty grievances; it does not end in wild words, but in great deeds. It was an anger like that which glowed in the heart of Christ. There are some men who are too tender to get angry; but we must never think of Jesus Christ as that—the wrath of the lion may be very terrible, but the wrath of the Lamb may be still more appalling. No words can exaggerate the gentleness of Jesus; but gentle people are sometimes the worst to trifle with. God save us at last from the look of anger in those eyes that are as a flame of fire!

Again there is the look of *love*; we find it in the story of the rich young ruler. We read that as Jesus went forth into the way there came one running and kneeled down before Him; and this was the cry that broke from his eager lips, 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' 'Thou knowest the commandments,' Jesus answered, 'Do not steal, do not bear false witness, honour thy father and mother'; and he replied, 'All these have I kept from my youth up.' That was a very startling answer—it was so frank, so confident, so bold. He did not say that he had tried his best to keep them, but he burst out vehemently 'I have done all that'; and in an instant the eyes of Christ were fixed on him; the gaze of the Master was piercing him through and through. We shall never know what the eyes of Jesus saw there; what tokens of spiritual hunger, what infinite yearnings; what marks of battles that had been fought and won, what gleams of a heart that had never yet been satisfied. Mark simply tells us that Jesus looking on him loved him; and if He loved him, it was because of what He saw.

In every one of us there is an unseen world; there are longings and ideals which find no expression. We never speak of them even to our intimates; if we wished to, we have no words in which to clothe them. Yet how much more truly are *these* things our real self than all our common

talk and outward life! Christ saw the rock in the shifting sand of Cephas. He saw the possible saint in Mary Magdalene. He saw the secret earnestness and hidden craving of the rich young ruler who was at His feet. And if Christ loves those from whom we would almost shrink; if He still, in the living spirit of His church, goes out to seek and to save those whom the world calls vile, it is because He sees what the world can never see with a gaze which goes down to the depths of human nature. He looks on men as He looked on the rich young ruler—then Jesus looking on him loved him.

Once more there is the look of *authority*. We should expect that, when we remember that He was a King. One notable instance of that kingly look occurs when our Lord was talking about riches. 'Children,' He said, 'how hard it is for those who have riches to enter into the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' The disciples were astonished out of measure on hearing that. They were dumbfoundered, and I do not wonder at it. And then, says Mark, Jesus looked round on them and said, With God all things are possible. I daresay some of them forgot the words; I am sure that not one of them ever forgot the look. It was not a look of enquiry or of anger; it was a

look of absolute authority. It stilled their fears and quieted their doubts. It conveyed to them in a flash the presence of God. It was like the calm look of a captain certain of victory, when the regiments are on the verge of panic.

It is a great thing to live and work and suffer under the authoritative look of Jesus Christ. We all need love and we all crave for love; but if life is to be resolute and earnest, we need authority no less than love. There were few lives ever lived in England more loftily or more loyally than John Milton's, and the secret of that life—in his own words—was this, 'As ever in my great task-master's eye.' If you ever listened to the oratory of Mr Gladstone, you will remember how the eye enforced the word. There was always one sentence at least, in every speech, that seemed very ordinary in the newspaper report, but the look that went with it was unforgettable, and charged the words with extraordinary power. Perhaps we shall never gauge the power of Christ's words on the men who heard them by the loch and on the hill, till we remember the look that went with them, as of One who moved among the deep things of God. Endeavour to realise that Christ is looking on you with the kingly and quiet authority of Galilee. 'Guide me with Thine eye,' said the psalmist, 'and afterward receive me to glory.'

Lastly, there is the look of *memory*, and I need hardly name the scene where we find that. It is in the court of the house of the High Priest on the sad night before the crucifixion. 'Though all men should deny Thee,' Peter had said, 'yet will I not deny Thee'; and the Lord had answered, 'Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice.' Now the threefold denial is fulfilled; and the Lord turned and looked on Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord.

There are certain hours when we seem to forget everything. There are seasons of panic and there are times of crisis when all that a man has won seems to be blotted out. But sometimes in a shipwreck when men are panic-stricken, the touch of a hand will bring them to themselves. And sometimes in a fire when women are beside themselves, the cry of a child will quiet them again. So Peter, panic-stricken and beside himself, had one look and one only, from his Lord, and in that look the past was all revived. He remembered the warning that the Lord had uttered; he remembered the kindness that his Lord had shown. The past—the dear dead days beyond recall; and *there* was the Master, *here* his foremost follower! The Lord turned and looked on Peter, and the memories in the look broke Peter's heart.

I sometimes think that the first look in eternity

will be this look of memory from Christ. When we waken—in the palace of the Great High Priest, —the glorified Lord will turn and look on us, and then like Simon Peter we shall remember. Our infancy, our fathers and our mothers, our brothers who played with us, our sisters who died; our prayers, our falsehoods, our secret life, our failures; the hands that helped us and the hearts that loved us,—the Lord will look on us and we shall remember all. God grant that *then* we go not out into the night; for if we go, it is never to return.

XXII

SPIRITUAL ANALYSIS

Jn. xii. 29: 'The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to Him.'

THE visit of these Greeks to Jesus was a very memorable hour in His experience. It opened up prospects to Him of a world-wide recognition, and in that recognition lay His glory. But immediately there pressed upon His heart the dark road by which that glory must be won, and as the vision of a cross rose clear before Him, His soul grew exceeding sorrowful even unto death. 'What shall I say,' He cried, 'Father save Me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father thy will be done, I take the cup: glorify Thy name, whatever the cost to Me'; and then there came a voice from heaven saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.' It was God's assurance in the darkest hour that through agony and death Christ would not be forsaken. It was the divine token given when needed most, that the love of heaven would not let Him go. And when the people heard the voice some said it

thundered, and others that an angel spake unto Him.

Now that at once suggests two thoughts to me, and these two, to which I ask your attention for a little, are: First, There are many things to which we can give either a lower or a higher meaning. Second, It is when we give such things their higher meaning that we are nearest to the truth.

First, then, there are many things to which we can give lower or higher meanings, and we see how clearly this is illustrated in the scene from which I have taken our text. There came a voice from heaven: it was the voice of God: that voice which is as the sound of many waters, and with the same accent of unutterable depth it fell on every ear of the awed bystanders. And to some it was nothing but the roll of thunder: there was nothing miraculous or supernatural about it; it was only the muttering and brooding of the storm that had been threatening to break perhaps since sunrise; but to others, gifted with finer sense, and among them it may be the shepherds who had been on the hills at Bethlehem, there was something in the sound that was inexplicable unless it had fallen from the lips of angels. It was the same note that struck on every ear. It was not the same note that struck on every heart. At the back of all we see and hear there is our character, and our character reacts on everything that reaches it. So

to the separate men there came the voice of God, and they all heard it—how could they help but hear it; yet when they heard it some said it thundered, and others that an angel spake to Him.

Now I might illustrate this truth in many spheres, and first let me ask you to think of the world of nature. It is the same world to every one of us, yet to every one of us how different it is. You send a geologist out into the country, and he has eyes for every rock and dip and cutting. You send a botanist out into the country, and every flower on the hedgebank speaks to him. To a poet there is a voice in every breeze, sermons in stones, books in the running brooks; but to Eugene Aram, cursed with a sense of guilt, every branch in the forest seemed to point a finger, and every zephyr whispered of detection. 'The thief doth fear each bush an officer,' says Shakespeare. Milton, writing of the nightingale, calls it 'bird most musical most melancholy'; yet the poet Coleridge, in a well-known passage, speaks of it as the merry nightingale. The fact is it was Milton who was melancholy, and it was not the nightingale but Coleridge who was merry: both listened to the same exquisite music, and then their sad glad hearts made all the difference. My point is that they are always doing that. Unto the pure all things are pure. Our life and mood

and character and temper react on everything we see and hear, until for one man this is a poor dead universe, and for another the very home of God. One world—yet some will call it a machine, and others will find it instinct with divinity. One voice—yet some said it thundered, and others that an angel spake to him.

Or turning from nature we might think of human life, the common life we are all leading. It is very surprising, when you get deep enough, to discover the oneness of all human hearts. It is our surface-life that really separates us; it is largely outward and accidental things that drive us asunder; when you get beneath the surface into that deeper region where the truer and intenser life is lived, it is wonderful how soon you find that touch of nature—the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin. Men tell us that if in one room you place two well-tuned harps, and if you strike a note loudly on one harp, immediately upon the other harp you will hear the same note faintly yet clearly echoing: and so when the chords of these souls of ours are touched by the one hand that is the master of their music, there is not a soul within hail but may be set a-vibrating in most mysterious and kindly unison. In our great experiences we understand each other. In our deeper joys and sorrows we are one. In our elemental passions, in our hopes and fears, our

social distinctions crumble in the dust. There is an essential oneness in our deepest and highest life, as there was in the voice that fell upon these bystanders.

But then the strange thing is that men should take that life, that common stock and harvest of experience, and should view it so differently and give it such different colourings as it passes through the alembic of their characters, that for one man life becomes a glory and for another man life becomes a curse. What is a pessimist? He is a man who holds that life for all its sunshine is a tragedy. What is an optimist? He is a man who holds that for all its tragedy life's brow is towards the sunrise. Yet pessimist and optimist alike, with a whole world between their interpretations, are looking out on the same crowded theatre, and listening to the same human voice divine. You remember how the poet Keats describes this life:—

> 'The weariness, the fever, and the fret
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
> Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
> Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
> And leaden-eyed despairs;
> Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
> Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.'

I should call that the pessimistic view. And you

remember how Longfellow describes this present life :—

> 'Life is real, life is earnest,
> And the grave is not its goal.'

I should call that the optimistic view. Yet before both there passed the same procession, and it was the one world which inspired both their songs. Some said it thundered when the voice was heard, and others said an angel spoke to Him. Some could hear nothing but a threatening tempest; others in the same voice detected angel music. And so with life at large, men are so different—may I not say they have made themselves so different—that where to one there is only the muttering storm, to another there are the broken syllables of God.

And is it not the same with our own life's experience? What different meanings we extract from it! It is not what we meet with that is of supreme importance, it is how we interpret what we meet with. The same joy will make one intensely selfish, and make another to be intensely grateful; and the same sorrow will make one man blaspheme, and bring another broken-hearted to God's feet. How many have cried in some desolating hour, when they have been stripped of the savings or of the love of years—how many have cried, lifting rebellious hands, 'This is cruel, I cannot believe God loves

me.' Yet Job, stripped in a day of everything, crushed, humbled, ruined, orphaned in an hour, could only cry, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.' Do not forget, then, that it is our privilege and our power always to react on whatever God may send. The speech of God has always double meanings, and the interpretation is not God's but ours. By all we have made ourselves, by what we strive for, by our faith, our love, our real and vital manhood, do we extract the meaning of our providences, and get just what is really our own. 'We aye get what we bring.' Some said that it thundered, others that an angel spake—it was the same voice transmuted through different hearts. And the vast distinction between the lives that triumph and those that go drifting out into the night, is not so much the kind of thing they meet with, as the kind of way in which they understand it.

Then I often think of our text and of its bearings when I read the gospel-story of the life of Jesus. What a moral test and touchstone was that life—take some of His great miracles and see what happened. 'He casteth out devils by Beelzebub,' the scribes said; and His friends and relatives said, 'He is beside Himself.' But the common people when they saw the miracles, immediately glorified the God of Israel. How is it

with us as we face that life to-day? What do we make of these deeds, these words, that death? God does not force us to accept the truth; He says 'There are the facts, interpret for yourselves.' Happy the man who in a simple faith has been so nourished and upbuilt by Jesus Christ, that though all the world should gainsay him he would still be confident that nothing less than an angel spake to him.

Thus far then of the first thought I wished to illustrate, that things may be capable of deeper or higher meanings; now secondly, and in a few sentences in closing, this: It is when we give such things their higher meaning that we are nearer to the truth.

Now I ask you to observe in the passage of our text that none of the bystanders gauged the voice correctly. Some said it thundered, and yet it did not thunder. Some said it was an angel, and yet no angel spoke. Both parties were wrong, both were beside the mark, as a matter of actual fact both were astray. Yet the men who interpreted the sound most loftily were far nearer to the truth than were the others. Whose was the voice that spake? It was the voice of God. And not one in the crowd recognised it as God's voice. To that extent every one of them was wrong, the wisest of them no less than the most foolish. But if an angel, with his magnificent intelligence stands

nearer to God than a dead thunderbank, and if the voice of an angel that expresses reason is more akin to God's voice than the brooding storm, then the men who interpreted the sound most loftily—who said it was not thunder but an angel—were far nearer to the truth than were the others.

Need I expand that lesson? I think not. You can take it home and practise it yourselves. The chances are that in nine-tenths of our judgments, you and I like these Jews are quite astray. But whatever you are judging, lean to the nobler side. If it is thunder or angels, vote you for the angels. I care not what it be, whether your neighbour's character, or your own trials, or public men, or scripture. And though when the morning breaks we all may be proved astray—for who dare be dogmatic in this world of shadows—I think we shall find that if we took life at its highest, and interpreted everything at the largest, not its least, we shall be nearer the truth as it is in Jesus, than if we had chosen in any lower way.

XXIII

A SEA OF TROUBLES

Gen. xlii. 36: 'All these things are against me.'

JACOB had passed through many dark experiences in the course of his long and intricate career, but perhaps this hour to which God had now led him was what the poet calls the sorrow's crown of sorrow. Joseph was lost, he thought; Simeon he was never to see again; and now Benjamin, the light of his eyes in his old age, was being grasped at by mysterious hands. It is little wonder that the old man's heart was well nigh broken. 'Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and will ye take Benjamin away? All these things,' says the patriarch, 'are against me.' It is on those words, then, that I wish to dwell for a little; and there are three thoughts that rise out of their depths before me. First, there are times when everything seems to be against us. Second, the things that seem against us may not be really so. Third, whether they are or not we can still triumph.

First, then, there are times when everything seems to be against us. It is clear that such a

time had come to Jacob. He had reached an hour such as we all reach sometimes when in the whole sky there is not one blink of sunshine. It had been a desolate season, I doubt not, long ago, when Jacob left his home and took the road to Bethel; but he was a young man then, with a heart that was beating bravely, and the world was all before him where to choose. Now he was old—life's fire was damped—and the land was famine-stricken and his sons were lost: Jacob had reached one of those bitter times when everything seemed to be against him.

That at once recalls to us another scene which the Bible gives us in the Book of Job; a scene that for ever, to the discerning heart, is exquisitely and dramatically true. There came a messenger unto Job and said—and while he was yet speaking there came another—and the words were yet panting on that servant's lips when hot-foot there came another running; till as by some tropical storm that in an hour rises and ravages the work of years, Job in the swift flight of a single day was left a ruined and desolated man. There is consummate art in that, as well as consummate truth. A pedant would have put a year between each messenger. But we may thank God that the Bible was not written by pedants, but by men who knew the realities of life. It is not the way of the messengers of evil to come at respectable and ordered

distances. Sometimes the hand of one has barely ceased to knock when the feet of another are hurrying to the threshold. So out of our own experience do we understand what the rapid succession of the patriarch's servants means. Like Jacob, Job had reached one of these sunless hours when everything seemed to be against him.

If this view of the coming of trouble be a true one, and not a rare or exceptional experience, there is one proof of it that we shall be sure to find. We shall find it expressed and crystallised in proverbs, for a proverb is an epitome of life; and a proverb will only live in a people's tongue if it interpret with some measure of truth a people's heart. Well, then, have we not one proverb that says, Troubles never come singly? Have we not another that says, It never rains but it pours? I question if there is any literature in the world that has not proverbs which voice a similar thought. These proverbs have lived because men feel that they ring true. In words which are powerful because they are pictorial they utter something which we all recognise. They might be written across this hour in Jacob's life, and they might form the motto of hours in your life and mine. For if every man finds that he has his good days, in which life moves forward like a strain of music, in which work prospers and time is well redeemed, and every friend with whom he meets is friendly; so every

man, I take it, has his bad days, when his whole world seems to have gone awry, when work seems useless, when every voice is jarring, and when vexation follows hard upon vexation. It is not a new experience—Jacob knew it well; and so did Job in that memorable hour. If you have times when everything goes against you, remember that the saints and heroes of the past have been familiar with the same experience.

May I not say that in the life of Jesus, too, we find traces of this unequal pressure? No one can study the Gospel with an unbiassed mind without detecting that experience there. I have heard men describe the human life of Christ as if it were one long and overwhelming anguish. I have heard others describe it as so full of gladness, that He must have felt like singing all the time. But if we only lay aside our prepossessions, and like honest men study the gospel page, we shall find that the actual facts are very different. The sunshine and shadow in the life of Jesus were unequally and irregularly distributed. There were days for Him when every voice made music; there were hours when everything seemed to be against Him. Had it been otherwise, the Bible dared not have written that He was tempted in all points like as we are. In that famous story of the chivalry of Switzerland you remember how Arnold von Winkelreid met his death. He gathered the spears of

the Austrians together, and pierced by twenty points fell for his country. So to our Lord there came the hour of darkness when sorrows were massed and gathered as to a common centre, and pierced, not by one shaft but by a score, He died as a sacrifice upon the cross. Will you remember that, when the worst comes to the worst? It is no strange trial that has befallen you. You are not exceptional in having days of gladness followed by hours when everything is dark. Jacob and Job had that, and David and Jesus of Nazareth —times when everything seemed to be against them. And it is a great thing to keep good company.

But I pass on now, and in the second place: Things that seem against us may not be really so. That this is true of Jacob in our text a moment's consideration will convince us. 'Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and will ye take Benjamin away?' He thought that Joseph was dead, slain out at Dothan; and Joseph was prime-minister of Egypt. He thought that Simeon was in the hands of enemies; and the most powerful statesman in Egypt was his friend. He thought that Benjamin would be seized and slain in Egypt; and over Benjamin a brother's love was yearning. Things never seemed blacker with Jacob than just then: as a matter of fact things never had been brighter. He cried 'All this is against me,' and he thought it was; but then if ever in his life the flowing tide

was with him. We say that the darkest hour is that before the dawn, but this was more than that, it was the dawn itself: but Jacob was blinded, heavy with overmuch sorrow; his windows were fast closed against the east. He said to his sons 'Beloved, it is night': he ought to have said 'Beloved, it is morn.'

The same thing meets me in the New Testament also, when I read what happened to the Apostle Paul. I find an hour in the life of that great heart when he too cried, All these things are against me. A child of freedom yet imprisoned at Rome; the wide world calling him and the gospel of Christ to preach, yet held in close ward and unable to leave the barracks; were not these things—that chain, that durance vile—were not all these things against the great apostle? Like Jacob in his tent so long before, what seemed against him was not really so. All Christendom is God's debtor for that chain—the chain of Paul has helped us to our liberty. There is a depth and a compass in his prison letters that nothing but seclusion could have given. And if Paul's great aim was to tell the world of Christ, and to spread abroad through the nations the gospel of forgiveness, we know now that all his many wanderings, serviceable and blessed though they were, have not done so much for the nations and the ages as have the days when he was a prisoner in Rome.

As it was with Jacob and with Paul, so I think it is with every one of us. God wraps His blessings up in strange disguises, and we rarely have faith to see into their heart. Many a thing that we should call a curse, in the language of heaven may be called a blessing; and many a thing we welcome as a blessing, in the language of heaven may be called a curse. I have known a piece of good fortune come to men, and it just sapped their character and ruined their children. The easy life is the hardest of all lives to live without rotting of the moral fibre. But I have known lives, too, that suddenly were burdened and the burden at the first seemed quite intolerable; yet the will has been so strengthened and the heart so nerved in the very bearing of the unlooked-for load—it has so widened the sympathies, enlarged the outlook, and deepened and sweetened all the springs of character—that by the end of the day the burden is transfigured into the love-gift of Almighty God. How often does a mother say to her child, 'Child, child, you don't know what is good for you!' Perhaps in this matter even the wisest of us are only children of a larger growth. And so like Jacob we cry, 'All this is against us, it is marring our happiness, it is spoiling our lives'; and God in His infinite wisdom lets the thorn remain, and whispers, 'My strength is made perfect in thy weakness.'

There is an old and beautiful legend of St

Christopher that has come down to us from the mediæval church. St Christopher who was a man of great prowess was a ferryman, and lived on the bank of a broad and swift-flowing river. And one winter's night when he was an old and white-haired man he heard a voice calling him from across the river, and wading over, there was a little child who pled with the ferryman to carry him across. St Christopher did it, for he loved his Lord; putting the little child on to his back he plunged into the stream; but the weight grew heavier and heavier as he advanced, until in mid-stream where the torrent swirled and swept, the burden became well-nigh insupportable, and the old ferryman breathed a prayer to God that he might not fail in his duty to the stranger. He struggled on until the bank was reached, and he stooped to let his burden down, and then in a twinkling the night shone as the day and he saw that the traveller he had borne was Christ. Out in mid-stream he cried, 'This is against me'; but on the bank he cried 'It is the Lord'—and it may be that on resurrection morning others will cry that besides St Christopher. Nothing is against us that helps to make us better. Nothing is against us that draws us nearer God. God did not put us here just to be happy; God put us here just that we might be His. I would suggest, then, in all life's darker seasons a wise and re-

verent suspense of judgment. It takes the totality to understand the parts, and we shall not see the whole until the morning.

The things that seem against us, then, may not be really so; then lastly, whether they are or not we may still triumph.

At the beginning of last century in Britain there were two poets whom everyone was reading. The one of these two poets was Lord Byron, the other was Sir Walter Scott. Both of these poets, strangely enough, were lame; both of them knew that their lameness was against them; yet in all literary history there is nothing more notable than the different ways in which they grappled with the trial. Byron was embittered by his lameness; he brooded on it till he loathed it; the thought of it took much of the colour and the beauty out of a character that might have been very fair. But Sir Walter Scott even to his dearest friend never complained or spoke one bitter word about it, until at last 'Ah Scott,' said Byron, 'I would give all my fame to have your happiness.' If God be for us who can be against us—all things are working together for our good. So may a man whose faith is firm and stedfast, wrestle on towards heaven 'gainst storm and wind and tide, till the light affliction which endureth for a moment, is changed into the glory of the dawn.

XXIV

HANDS BEAUTIFUL

Luke xxiv. 39: 'Behold My hands.'

THE Bible is signally distinguished for this, that with a message from God it reaches the human heart, but not less remarkable is the attention which it directs to the human hands. In our Western speech, with its leaning towards abstraction, we speak of character and its outflow in conduct; but in the Eastern speech, which has always been pictorial, men spoke of the heart and its witness in the hands. Who shall ascend into the hill of God? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart. If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth. And Pilate, wishing to assert his innocence, in a manner which the Jews could comprehend,—Pilate did not cry, My conduct is reproachless—in the presence of them all he washed his hands. That is the symbolism of the hand in scripture. It is conduct incarnate, the sign of the active life. It is the organ through which is

sketched, as on a screen, the thought that is singing or surging in the heart.

Now if that be true of every human hand, it will be very specially true of the hands of Christ. He is always saying to us 'Behold My heart': but in the same voice He says, 'Behold My hands.' Could any meditation, then, be more appropriate for this quiet evening of a Scotch communion Sabbath? Try to conceive that Christ is in our midst to-night, *that* Christ on whose body and blood mystical we fed to-day. Try to conceive that He is standing here and saying to every one of us, 'Behold My hands.' What are these hands? What do they signify? We shall run through the gospel story that we may see.

Behold His hands, then, for they are hands of brotherhood.

When Jesus came into Peter's house, we read, He saw his wife's mother laid and sick of a fever. And what did He do? He put out His hand and touched her, and she arose and ministered to them all. When He was in Bethsaida they brought a blind man to Him, beseeching Him that He would give him his sight again. And what did He do? He took the blind man by the hand, and hand in hand they left the town together. And the world will never forget that scene at Nain, when Jesus met the sad procession to the grave, and moved with compassion He put forth His hand, and

touched the bier. In all these cases, and in a hundred others, what men recognised in the touch was brotherhood. Here was no cold and separated pity, no condescension, no distance of heart from heart. Christ came alongside of suffering and sorrow, brought Himself into living and actual touch with it; and the men who were standing by, and who saw it all, said, 'Behold His hands, they are the hands of brotherhood.'

And always, where the gospel is at work, it stretches out its hands in the same way. Is not this the glory of the Christian spirit that it pulsates with the sweet sense of brotherhood. The poet Crabbe, talking about charity, says:—

> 'A common bounty may relieve distress,
> But whom the vulgar succour they oppress.'

But the Christian never lowers when he helps, for with everything he gives, he gives his hand. It is not the way of the gospel to isolate itself, and to give cold advice and help as from a distance. It bears men's burdens, understands their need, calls the poorest, brother, and the fallen, sister. Until men feel that the hands stretched out to-day are the very hands that touched the bier at Nain, and they know that the hands of Christ are hands of brotherhood.

Again, Behold His hands, for they are hands of power.

When Jesus went back the second time to Nazareth, do you remember what the villagers said about Him? What they could not fathom was how this carpenter's son was endued with His unquestionable power. 'What wisdom is this that is given Him,' they said, 'that even such mighty works are wrought by His hands.' They had seen these hands busy at carpentering once, but now there was a power in their touch that baffled them. And then I turn to the gospel of St John, where our Saviour Himself is speaking of His sheep: and he says, 'I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.' Behold His hands, then, for they are hands of power: they are powerful to do and powerful to keep. There have never been hands on earth like those of Jesus, so mighty in action and in guardianship.

I read the other day in some book about China a remark that had been made by a young Chinese convert. He belonged to the literary class, and had studied Confucius, and the remark he made was something of this kind. He said, 'The difference between Confucius and Christ is not so much a question of morality: for I find the golden rule in the sacred books of the East, and a great deal more that Jesus might have uttered; but the difference is that once I was told what to do, but left quite helpless and powerless to do it; but

now with the ideal comes the power.' The hand of Confucius was a cold, dead hand: it had written the maxim—it could not inspire the man. There was no power in its touch to kindle the dark heart, to animate the will, to change the life. But in contact with Jesus it was very different—that was the meaning of this Chinese student—there was healing and there was power in His touch. What is the power that has abolished slavery? What is the power that has given us a free Scotland? What is the power that has changed ten million lives, inspired the missionary, and made the social worker? The power is the power of the touch of Jesus: it is the impress and the impact of His hand. Behold His hands, then, in the advance of Christendom. Behold His hands in the change of countless lives. Behold them in the new ideals of the multitude; in the graces and perseverance of the saint. They are not only hands of brotherhood, for their very touch has been an inspiration. Behold His hands, for they are hands of power.

Then again, Behold his hands, for they are hands of tenderness.

Of all the exquisite pictures in the gospel I think there is none more exquisite than the scene when 'the mothers of Salem their children brought to Jesus.' With a mother's instinct for a man who was really good, they wished their children to be

blessed by Him. And the disciples would have kept the children off: Christ was too busy with great affairs to heed an infant. They had never guessed yet that the kingdom of heaven was mirrored for Jesus in these childish eyes. Then Jesus drew the little children to Him, and blessed them; but He did more than that. It had sunk deep into the memories of the evangelists that in blessing them He laid His hand upon them. Do not spoil the act by making it sacerdotal. Do not imagine that He was communicating grace. It was an act of the sweetest and most natural tenderness, the gentle and caressing touch of love. When He laid His hand upon the infant's head, He was laying it upon the mother's heart. Do you think these mothers ever would forget it? Some of them would see that hand again. It would be pierced then, streaming with red blood, and they would say, 'Look! that hand was once laid upon my child.' Behold His hands, then, they are hands of power; but the mothers could tell you that they were hands of tenderness.

Is not that one of the wonders of Christ's touch —the union of power and gentleness that marks it? It is mighty to heal, mighty to raise the dead; but a bruised reed it will not break. Christ is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, so is He named in the Book of Revelation: but when John looked in heaven for the Lion, behold, in the midst

of the throne a Lamb as it had been slain. Can you tell me why the gospel is so precious when the chair is empty and the grave is full? Can you tell me why in seasons of disappointment, in times of distress, anxiety, and sorrow, men find in the Bible their best and truest comforter? It is not only because the hand of Jesus is powerful to console and to assuage; it is because when every other touch would pain, the touch of Jesus is exquisitely tender. Why are our Christian homes so full of gentle love, so different from the stern spirit of antiquity? There is only one answer, it is 'Behold His hands': it is the touch of Christ which has achieved it. In the tender and happy grace of Christian womanhood—behold His hands. In the kindness and care that is shown to the dumb creatures—behold His hands. The very dogs, says Dr Laws of Livingstonia, the very dogs here feel the benefits of Christianity. His touch is mighty, then, mighty to heal and save—there are those here to-night who vouch for that. But the hand that was laid so gently on the children has never been withdrawn from humanity.

Once more, Behold His hands for they were once disfigured. Their beauty was torn away from them with wounds. They were pierced with nails, and fastened to the cross, in the hour when Jesus Christ was crucified. I have often thought that the scribes and pharisees must have

had a twice-distilled pleasure when the hands were nailed. They would say 'Behold these hands that once wrought such mighty deeds; they will never trouble or vex us any more. Look at them ragged and torn, pierced through and through.' It was an exquisite morsel of revenge. These hands had played havoc with the priest's hypocrisies: they had plaited the scourge and used it in the Temple. Look at them now on the cross—what hands in the world so powerless—their little day of authority is dead.

But the strange thing is that it is the hands which were pierced that have been the mightiest power in human history. Not the hands laid upon the blind man's eyes, not the hands laid upon the children's head, have been so mighty in the world's redemption as the hands that were marred and wounded on the cross. Is not that strange? There was a little maiden whose mother was very beautiful—some of you have heard this story from me before—she was very beautiful excepting her hands, and her hands were shrunken and shrivelled and unsightly. For long, with the delicate reticence of girlhood, the little girl said nothing on the matter; but at last her curiosity overpowered her. And 'Mother,' she said, 'I love your beautiful face, and I love your beautiful eyes and brow and neck; but I cannot love your hands, they are so ugly.' Then her mother told

her the story of her hands. She said 'When you were an infant sleeping in your cradle, one night the cry of fire rang through the house. I rushed upstairs—the nursery was ablaze—but God led me right to the cradle and I saved you; but ever since then my hands have been like this.' The little girl was silent for a moment. Then she said 'O mother, I still love your face and your brow and your eyes: *but I love your hands now best of all.*' Behold His hands, for they were pierced for us!

Lastly, Behold His hands for they are hands of reassurance.

After Jesus was risen from the dead, the disciples gathered together and Thomas was with them. And Jesus appeared standing in their midst, and said to them 'Peace be with you.' We all know how Thomas had doubted Him. He had said 'Except I see in His hand the print of the nails.' Nothing would satisfy or convince that realist except the print of the nail upon the palm. And Jesus said to him, 'Thomas, behold My hand; is not that the hand that was nailed upon the tree?'—which hearing and seeing, Thomas falls before Him crying 'My Lord and my God.' I ask you ever to remember, then, that the hand of Christ is a reassuring hand. When we are tempted to doubt if He still lives and reigns, to us as to Thomas he says, 'Behold

My hands.' Much may be dark to us and much may be inexplicable; we may not fathom the mysteries of grace. We know not where Jesus is, nor can we behold Him; but like Thomas we can behold His hands. In a thousand deeds and in a thousand lives there is the unmistakable touch of the Redeemer. Does not that reassure us and kindle our faith again? Does it not inspire our hope and nerve our faint endeavour? It is the risen Saviour saying 'Behold my hands': it is our answering cry 'My Lord and my God.'

XXV

THE OUTLOOK OF THE OPTIMIST

Ezek. xxxvi. 11: 'I will do better unto you than at your beginnings.'

EZEKIEL is one of the most severe and stern of all the prophets, and no words in the Old Testament are more intense than those in which he describes the idolatries of Israel. Severity has always been one mark of the true prophet, just as to prophecy smooth things is one mark of the false, and you can recognise this stern note in every prophetic message, from that of Amos to that of Carlyle. But if the prophet spoke sternly, that was never his final word—there was always a budding morrow in his midnight. However black and thunderous the clouds might be, there was ever a rainbow lifting its arch heavenward. Israel would repent, Israel would be restored again; the mountain of the Lord in latter days would rise. It is of such a time that Ezekiel is here speaking. It is to such a time that our great text applies. I will do better unto you, says God to Israel, than at your beginnings.

To this doctrine which our text embodies might be given the name of prophetic optimism. Ezekiel,

Isaiah, even weeping Jeremiah—none of them were pessimists, they were all optimists; and the secret of that strong prophetic optimism is to be found in such a text as this. There is an optimism that is temperamental; it depends largely upon physical constitution. We talk of men being born with a silver spoon in their mouths, but there are some who are born with a kind of golden hopefulness. Just as there are those who on the sunniest morning are always certain it will rain by nightfall, so are there others who when the rain is lashing are confident that the sky will clear by afternoon. That is a temperamental optimism. And then there is a very shallow optimism that is happy because it is half-blind. It deliberately shuts its eyes on what is dark and refuses to see objectionable elements; if it were less cowardly it would have more appreciation of the difficulties that beset all earnest hope. There is no more untrustworthy or unreliable leader, whether in war or in the state or in the church, than the leader who blandly minimises difficulties. I need hardly tell you that prophetic optimism is never based upon deliberate ignorance. It is based on the fact that underneath all change are the arms of the everlasting God.

This same feature—this strong and virile optimism—is found in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, but the changes He wrought in it, and the new application He gave it, are a striking

example of how He fulfilled the prophets. Just think for a moment of the prodigal son—do you see how our text is exemplified in him? He had been nursed in love and nurtured in pleasant tenderness ever since the moment of his birth. Then he went away to the far country, and broken-hearted he came home again—and all the love that had been lavished on his childhood was as nothing to the welcome he received. Bring forth the best robe and put it on him—he had been forbidden to touch it when he was a child. Put a ring on his finger and shoes upon his feet—his father is bent on doing better for him. And if you can gauge the distance between the chapter of Ezekiel and that great parable in the gospel of St Luke, you shall have measured the growth of spiritual optimism from the prophets to the Lord Jesus Christ. To Ezekiel, the basis of optimism is God's sovereignty; but to Jesus, the basis of optimism is God's love. To Ezekiel, the brighter future is for Israel, but in the teaching of Christ it is for one wandering child. It is because God is our Father and we are His children, that He will do better unto us than at the beginning.

I am quite aware that in actual experience the message of our text seems often contradicted. A man may say, I have put my trust in God, I have striven to be patient, and I have tried to follow Him; yet I cannot say I am any happier for it—

my happiest days are days of long ago. Ah well, if our text had said, I shall make thee *happier* than at thy beginnings, there might have been some ground for quarrelling with Scripture; but our text says, I shall do *better* for thee, and that is a very different thing. For God does better for us when He makes us trust Him, when He weans us from things of sense towards the Infinite, when He wakens us to the value of the spiritual, when He widens our influence and frees us of our pride; and if the shallower happiness of a past day must go, and if we must be brought into deeper waters as we journey, I suggest that possibly all the time God may be doing better for us than at our beginnings.

Think of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a signal instance of the fulfilment of this promise in the teeth of much that seems to contradict it. What! was it better to be tempted in the wilderness than to live in the pleasant uplands of secluded Nazareth? Was it better to be hated and laughed to scorn than to wander on the green hill-side and dream great dreams? Was Gethsemane better than the village garden? Was betrayal better than the enfolding love of Mary? And when the hour of the cross came, with the nails and spear-wound, and all its agony of thirst and desolation—was God doing better now for Jesus of Nazareth than in the fair beginning of His years? I think that Mary at least would have

said No. How different our answer is to-night! We see the inner meaning of Gethsemane. We recognise that the straight road to kingship was through the misery and woe of Calvary. And if it is better to be Saviour and Redeemer than to be an unknown toiler in a little hamlet, if it is better to inspire a million hearts than to dream dreams in the silence of the hills, than in the wilderness and in Gethsemane and on the cross of Calvary, God did better for Jesus than at His beginning.

I want you to notice too that here, in the sharpest manner, the leadership of evil differs from that of God. It is one strange mark of everything that is evil, that its to-morrow leaves us worse than yesterday. Well-nigh a hundred years ago, if you had lived in Edinburgh, you might have seen two men at two book-stalls selling books. Thirty years afterwards one of these two men had a publishing-house known all over Britain; and the other still hurled his barrow in sore poverty. One piercing November night he drew up his barrow in the street right under the great establishment of his old rival, and 'Ah,' he said, 'thirty years ago, he and I stood at our counters in Leith Walk, and I sold as many books as he did, and perhaps more; but every penny that *I* got was squandered, while he was reading and working and saving and planning and hoping—*and there he is, and here I am.*' What a world of pathos in that there and

here! How the roads had parted, honourwards and deathwards, since that far off hour when the men stood together. There was little difference in their beginnings—but how different were all things to them now! The truth is that sin would have no power save for the fact that its beginnings are very sweet. Had it been harsh or repulsive at the outset, the world would never have needed a Redeemer. But it offers us immediate satisfaction; it says, 'All these kingdoms will I give thee instantly'; and here it differs by the whole universe from God, whose best beginnings are often very hard. Do you think that the sot whose life has been wrecked by drunkenness has been well treated by his imperious appetite? Do you think it is better with him now—disgraced, dishonoured, wrecked—than in the beginning when his hopes were high? The question carries the answer in itself.

I like to think, too, that our text holds good of all the social relationships of life when these are based on God. It is not only to us as individuals, but to us in the tender comradeships of earth, that God says, I will do better unto you than at your beginnings. Here for example is a mother with her child, and there is something infinitely dear to her in helpless infancy. There comes a day, too, of such sweet and childish winsomeness, and of a prattle that is so irresistibly captivating, that the

mother can conceive no greater happiness than to have the child remain a child for ever. It is in such hours if the home be one of prayer that the words of our text should be graven on the heart. However sweet such a tie when it is new, God is going to do better by and bye. What means the peace that lies like a benediction on homes where husband and wife have lived long years together? Why do we say there are no friends like old friends? Why is it that where you have a true minister and a loyal people, there is a tenderness of affection after forty years that you could not have looked for after five or ten? It is just the fulfilment of the promise of God, I will do better unto you than at your beginnings. True hearts are not skilful in the art of revelation—all that comes gradually and slowly. So through the strain and stress and trial of years, and the lights and shadows of all God's finer testings; through seasons of weariness and languor of the heart, through days of mutual joy and shared-in triumph, do ties become richer and more full of rest than even in the glad hours of their beginning.

In closing let us never forget that our whole life is really a beginning. These three score years are only the first chapter of a story that shall be continued otherwhere. You remember the opening verse in the Book of Acts? The writer turns straight towards Jesus as he opens,

and he says 'The former treatise have I made, Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach.' All that Jesus *began* to do and teach until the hour that He was received up; then the life of Jesus on this side of the grave was only a beginning after all. If that is true of the perfect life of Christ, how much more true is it of your life and mine? We have barely begun to live, begun to work, begun to discover the continents we craved for, when the sun goes westering down into the sea. Without a sunrise elsewhere, it is hopeless. Without a God, it is the worst of tragedies. To me life is inexplicable and meaningless—unfair, unequal, unbalanced, and unjust—unless we are to carry on elsewhere the task which here with such toil and tears we have begun. So God stoops down to us in infinite mercy, and He says, Child, all your life on earth is a beginning; but I shall do better for you than at your beginnings, when sorrow and sighing shall have fled away. In that hope we can be strong and steadfast; we can begin again after a hundred failures; we can ask for no other triumph here than the triumph of never giving in.

XXVI

THE BOAT'S BREADTH

John xxi. 6: 'Cast the net on the right side of the ship.'

THERE are few scenes in the Gospel more impressive than this scene in the early morning by the sea of Galilee. Not even the meeting between Christ and Mary in the garden is more touching or tender than this incident. Calvary was past, the night of darkness was ended; Jesus had risen and the awful strain was over. It is in such hours that men instinctively turn again to the common toils which the strain has interrupted, and in such an hour Peter said 'I go a-fishing.' So Peter and his comrades toiled all night, but for all their toil, their fishing was a failure. Night—nothing—how these words chime together; night—nothing, morning—master. For in the morning the risen Christ stood by the lake, and cried to them 'Children, have ye any meat?' There was only one answer to that straight question—it was No (we may be near to Christ, and yet be starving); then He said to them, 'Cast the net on the right side of the ship.' They cast it therefore, and it

was filled with fish. Whereon in an instant the disciple whom Jesus loved, and to whom the love of Christ gave eyes like the eyes of an eagle, turned to his comrades and said, 'It is the Lord.'

The words, then, that I wish to dwell upon are these: Cast the net on the right side of the ship. And what do they suggest to me? These three important truths. First, what we long for is often nearer than we think. Second, we should never be afraid to change our methods. Third, Christ can manage things for us better than we can ourselves.

First, then, what we long for is often nearer than we think. You see at a glance that it was so that morning. Somehow, within the sweep of their nets, was the harvest of the sea these men were looking for. All night they had toiled without one sign of fish; they had lost heart, they were weary, hungry, hopeless. 'Ah!' they would whisper, 'this loch is sadly changed; there used to be good fish in it, there doesn't seem one in it now.' But the fish were there, as plentiful as ever, nor were they far away in remote bays and creeks: cast the net on the right side of the ship —and it was full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three. What they had toiled for all night was not remote. What their hearts were set on was not far away. When Peter and Thomas and John recalled that morning amid the

stress and the struggles of the after years, it would flash on them as one of its sweetest memories that what we long for may be nearer than we think.

Now often in reading the Bible I am struck with the divine insistence on that truth. And I take it that when God repeats a thing, He is bent on getting it graven on our hearts. Let me only recall to you the case of Hagar, when she fled with Ishmael under the taunts of Sarah. Her flight lay through the desert with her child, and in the desert her womanly strength gave out. There was no water, there was no sign of water; and her child was perishing, and she cried to Abraham's God. And then and there God opened Hagar's eyes and within a stone's cast of her child there was a well. She would have given all the world for water, and it was running near her all the time. She thought of the well beside the tent of Abraham, and there was a spring not a hundred yards away. And the days would pass, and Hagar would reach Egypt; and she would dwell among the temples of idolatry, but she would remember, when all her hair was silvered, that the things we long for may be nearer than we dream.

Every one of us needs to learn that lesson. We are so prone to think that the best is inaccessible. But all that we long for—happiness, love, peace, power—like the hundred and fifty fishes is just here.

Ah sirs, if all that we craved for was remote, life would not be so tragic as it is. If all that we craved for was very far away, the story of humanity would be less pitiable. But the pity of a thousand lives is this, that love and joy and power and peace are here, yet by the breadth of a fishing boat men somehow miss them, and all their life they are toiling in the dark. It is easy to run away from home. It is not so easy to run away from self. Believe that the kingdom of heaven is within you. Believe that the best and the brightest is just here. The things that we crave for, without which we cannot live, which make all the difference between morn and midnight, these things are always nearer than we dream.

And if that is so of happiness and love you may be certain it is so of Christ: Peter and Nathanael and James and John made that discovery beside the lake. The scene was full of memories of Jesus: every light that twinkled on the loch shore recalled Him. I do not think one hour would pass that night, when the nets were shot and the fishing boat was rocking, but the name of Jesus would be on Peter's lips. They were longing for Him with a longing quite immeasurable; they missed Him unutterably, they could not live without Him. And they learned in the morning when He stood on the shore and called them, that the Christ they longed for was nearer

than they thought. Do I speak to any who are longing for a Saviour? To any who have toiled all night and have caught nothing? To any who are saying 'My life is a sorry failure, although God knows I have struggled in the dark?' Behold! I stand at the door and knock, says Christ —the very power and presence that you need. It is easy to believe that Christ wrought in Galilee. It is easy to believe His power in the past. The hard thing is to believe that here and now there is One who can redeem and save and change you. Yet that is what you are longing for to-night. No one else knows it: they think you are quite satisfied. But you are not satisfied, and I am here to tell you that all that you long for is nearer than you dream.

But I pass on: and in the second place, we should never be afraid to change our methods. Just think what would have happened by the lake, if the disciples had been mastered by that cowardly fear. All night they had cast their nets on the left side—there may have been some fisherman's superstition in the matter—they were simply doing what they had been taught to do, they were holding fast to universal custom. Then in the morning came the ringing voice 'Cast the net on the right side of the ship. Try a new method now. Adopt new plans. Strike out on a new course in the gray dawn.' What a deal

the disciples would have lost if they had sullenly refused to make that venture! No mighty fish would have filled their net to breaking. No one in the boat would have cried 'It is the Lord.' The figure would have vanished from the shore, the hot sun would have mounted; and a dreary day would have followed a weary night. But they cast their nets and everything was different. They altered their plans, and the day became divine. It was Christ who was near them; the Saviour whom they loved. They had a day of royal fellowship with Him. And I think that in after years when Peter and James and John were fighting their Lord's battles in the world, as often as they recalled this scene in Galilee they would never be afraid to change their methods.

In our moral and spiritual life we must get rid of this debasing fear. When we have been toiling all night and have caught nothing, it is time to cast the net upon the other side. Henry Drummond used to tell us of a duel that he had witnessed in one of the German universities. The combatants faced each other, and the swords made rapid play, and stroke after stroke was given, parried, baffled. Then suddenly, quick as a flash, one fighter changed his tactics; with the swiftness of thought he gave an unlooked-for stroke; and by the unlooked-for stroke the first blood was drawn. We are all fighting heavenward and

Godward in a duel far more terrible than that of German students. There is not one of us in whom the flesh does not lust against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and sometimes it seems as if victory were impossible. Try some new plan to-night. Strike out upon fresh lines. Have the courage to adopt a novel stroke. You have been fishing on the left and failing long enough. Cast the net on the right side of the ship.

Of course I would not have any one imagine that Jesus is putting a premium upon fickleness. There is no more hopeless character in the world than that of the fickle and inconstant man. The very fact that all through the weary night the disciples had evidently fished on the left side, shows that in all of them there was that noble doggedness without which strong character is never forged. The man who can toil all night though he gets nothing is the rough material out of which saints are made. There is something heroic in all quiet persistency, especially when not one fish comes to the net. But to all of us, I imagine, there come mornings like the morning that dawned on these fishers at the lake; hours when we feel more intensely, when we see more vividly, when hopes are born in us and when new vistas open. It is in such hours, if we be men at all, that we will never hesitate to make great

changes—we will cast our nets on the right side of the ship. We have never really prayed, but we shall pray now. We have never been thankful, we shall be thankful now. We have let devotion take the place of service, or we have let service take the place of prayer. Beware of the tyranny of habit in religion. There are ruts for the heart as well as for the wheels. We have toiled all night upon the left and have caught nothing. Cast the net on the right side of the ship.

And that is not only a lesson for the individual: it is a lesson for the whole church of Christ. I am no advocate of ill-considered changes. A mighty church must always be slow to move. I love old sanctuaries worn by the hand of time, and the grass-grown corners where our fathers sleep. I love to worship simply and in quiet places, where the leaves brush against the windows and the birds are singing, where there are rugged faces round me that have known what tears are; where I can bow in reverence before Almighty God. I love solemnity and dignity in worship. I love a church mellowed and grey with years. But the question of questions is not what I love. The question of questions is *what about the nets*? Are they full, are they empty, are there any fish in them? Are men being saved? Is the world being redeemed? If it is not, then let the dead past bury its dead, and

cast the nets on the right side of the ship. Do not be eager for a change of methods. Do not be afraid of a change of methods. Measure the matter by the nets, and the nets only—by the power of the church with a dying and lost world.

> 'New occasions teach new duties,
> Time makes ancient good uncouth,
> They must up and ever onward
> Who would keep abreast of truth.'

In the third place I was to speak of this, that Christ can manage our daily life better than we can ourselves. But the time has gone and I can only hint at it, for it is too precious a matter to be wholly omitted. Now just think of it, Peter and James were fishermen. They had been falling into that loch since they were babies. They knew every bay in it and every trick of the wind and every art and secret of the fisherman's craft. Then Jesus came to them. He gave directions. Did they resent it as gross interference? They did what He bade them, and doing it they found that He could manage their business better than they themselves.

Now after we have preached, business men sometimes say, 'Ah! the minister knows nothing about business.' That may be true, yet I should like to say in passing that the more I know business men, the more I honour them. In the

face of risks we ministers know nothing of, they shew a courage and a patience that put some of us to shame. I have felt a hundred times since coming to Glasgow that had I but half the consecration to *my* business, that I see in the lives of some business men to whom I preach, I might be less haunted with the sense of doing nothing. But that is by the way, my point is this—though the minister does not understand, remember Christ does. He can give advice to the most cunning fisherman, and the fisherman will never regret that he adopted it. Consult Him when all your labour is a failure. Go to Him on the eve of every venture. Tell Him all about it. Ask His advice on it. He knows far more about fishing than ever Peter did. It is such a pity that the fish should all be there, and that by a boat's breadth you should miss your share of them—the share which God in His providence meant for you, and which you lose because you will not take His way.

XXVII

MISUNDERSTOOD

Mk. xv. 35: 'Behold, He calleth Elias.'

We are here in the centre of the Gospel mystery. It is the closing scene in the earthly life of Jesus. Jesus has been betrayed, He has been scourged and crucified, and in a little while the sorrow will be over. It is then that in His unutterable agony He cries, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani'—and some of them that stood by when they heard it said, 'Behold, He calleth Elias.' They misinterpreted that last drear cry. They thought He was speaking to Elias and not to God. So at the very end, and on the cross itself, Jesus was misunderstood.

The strange thing is that what happened in this last scene of the life of Jesus had happened also in the first of which we read. It had happened on that memorable occasion when Jesus was a lad of twelve years old, and had gone up with Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem. There they had lost Him — you recall the story — and they hurried back to Jerusalem to find Him; and all the time they thought it was childish wantonness — the careless wandering of a happy boy. 'Son,' said

Mary, 'why hast Thou thus dealt with us? Behold thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing': and He said unto them, 'How is it that ye sought me: wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?' His nearest and His dearest misconstrued Him. There were purposes of heaven in His waiting, and they thought at the best it was a boyish frolic. So Christ began by being misunderstood, and ended misunderstood on Calvary.

On that subject I wish to speak to-night—the way in which Jesus was misunderstood. And the very fact that He was so misunderstood is a tribute to the greatness of our Lord. There is, it is true, a very real sense in which we are all of us misapprehended. Even the shallowest heart is far too deep ever to utter itself aright to any man. Yet in large measure we understand each other when we are moving on the same lines and levels; it is when a man is transcendently original, that he is certain to be misunderstood. Men did not misinterpret John the Baptist; they recognised him as a prophet and they honoured him. And I feel that Jesus must be greater than John when the whole nation misunderstood Him so.

You will observe, too, that if Christ was misunderstood it was not from any subtlety of character. If He was supremely great, do not forget that He was supremely simple—His life is transparent as the finest glass. It is hard to say how high

the mountain is when the mists hang round it and it is wrapped in cloud; and there are men like that—men who never reveal themselves, and such men are certain to be misinterpreted. If you have not the courage to be a clear, straight man, you must not wonder if we all misjudge you. It is part of the penalty which every hypocrite pays that he is involved in perpetual misunderstandings. But Christ? He was sincerity incarnate! filled with one passion and pressing for one goal. There was never such a simplicity on earth as that of the character of Jesus; yet for all that there never was a character which was so hopelessly misunderstood. Is not that very strange? I think it is. It sharpens the thorn in my Redeemer's crown. Great Saviour! who wast so true and open—it was Thou who wert misunderstood!

I want to follow that misinterpretation into one or two spheres of the earthly life of Jesus: and I notice first that men misunderstood His motives. Think for example of His healing miracles—'He casteth out devils by Beelzebub,' they said. There was no gainsaying that the devils were routed, and that the sick were healed, and that the dead were raised. It was all part and parcel of Christ's gracious ministry. It was the kingdom of God coming with power among them. *That* was the motive of it—let God's kingdom come. *That* was the meaning of it—let sin be overthrown. And

'He casteth out devils by Beelzebub,' they said. Or think of His eating with publicans and sinners. You know the motive of that condescension? It was love—it was love unutterable for mankind—that shattered the barriers and made Christ a brother. But 'He is a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber,' they said. 'He feels at home with sinners, and so He eats with them.' That condescension spelled out love divine, and they thought it was proof positive of guilt.

If you are Christ's you must expect that too, for the servant is not greater than his Lord. If you are truly in earnest about the kingdom, and striving to live along the lines of Jesus, be sure your motives may be misconstrued. There is not a deed you do but men may question it, and run it back into your secret thought, and if there be two possible motives for it, you may be certain that the world will choose the worse. Tell me what are you really thinking in the very moment when you are praising so and so? Ah, if we could only read your thoughts sometimes, I fear we might think little of your praise. It is that knowledge which keeps a Christian steadfast through the world's censure and the world's applause. In the light of Christ he has learned his lesson to expect his motives to be misunderstood. And so he takes the world's praise very lightly, detects the fester at the roots of it, lifts

his brow heavenward, goes forward to his duty, and leaves his final judgment to his God.

Again I remark that men misunderstood the mystical and poetic speech of Jesus. They took Him very prosaically and literally when He only meant to suggest as music does, and so time and again they misconstrued Him. Take for example one of His early words, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.' And as He spake, I doubt not, he would wave His hand toward His own body. *That* was the Temple, the home of the living God, a thousand times greater than these mighty stones; but they were literalists—the Temple? there it was—and not one Jew in all the circle caught the rich suggestion of the Lord. So, too, in the sad sweet story of the home at Bethany you recall how Jesus said to His disciples 'Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.' And they all loved Jesus—that little band of followers—and love gives a man eyes to understand. Yet they answered at once 'Lord if he sleep, he shall do well,' and Jesus, with a touch of pity at their dulness, had to tell them plainly that Lazarus was dead. They had not grasped the sweet suggestion of the word. They took Christ literally and misunderstood Him—and yet they were His disciples, and they loved Him.

I think that Jesus is still misunderstood that way. There are men who love Him as these disciples did, and who are striving to serve Him

in a life of duty, but they have taken the music of His speech, that was meant to suggest and to lead into the infinite, and they have built their arguments upon the letter of it, forgetting that it is the spirit that giveth life. Believe in the possibilities of Jesus' speech. No creed or commentary can ever exhaust it. It may have been interpreted a thousand times, but there is some new gleam of heaven in it for me. Take all the words of Jesus at their largest. Be not afraid: expand them infinitely. In everything He ever said there is far more than has ever yet been grasped by Christendom.

The world, then, misunderstood the speech of Jesus; but it also misunderstood His silence. There is no clearer instance of that in the four gospels than in the scene we read from the gospel of Luke to-night. Christ had been sent by Pilate to Herod, and Herod when he saw Him was exceeding glad. He plied his prisoner with ceaseless questions, and he hoped to have seen some miracle at last. But Christ would do no miracle and would answer nothing. Silent and unresponsive, He stood still. And if ever the silence of Jesus was misunderstood, it was that day by Herod. He took it as a confession of His impotence. It was because Christ was powerless, that He was speechless. The dignity of it, and all the royalty of it, was lost on Herod. He misunderstood the silence of the Christ.

Is not Christ's silence still misunderstood? There is nothing harder for many a mind to grapple with than the apparent silence of our ascended Lord. It is not what God does, it is what He fails to do; it is not what Christ says, it is what He fails to say, that puzzles and perplexes many an earnest soul. Has He no word of answer when we cry to Him? Does He not hear the moaning of the world? Why are the heavens of brass, when such things happen? Is there no eye to pity this poor earth? Until we are tempted to say, He does not know: until we are tempted to cry, He does not care: and all the time, like Herod in the gospel, we have misunderstood the silence of the King. Not that I can explain that silence. It is inscrutable and mysterious and dark. But I am determined not to misinterpret it; I shall suspend my judgment till the glory. And *then*, I take it, it will so shine with meaning and will be so bright with patience and with love, that at last I shall begin to understand the mysterious silence of my Lord.

One word and I have done. Come back to our text again before we close. 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,' and when they heard it they said He calleth *Elias*. Do you see the reason why they misunderstood Him? They had only caught a fragment of his speech. They had only heard a syllable or two. Had they caught the whole of it—let the whole sentence sink into their hearts—

they would have known that He was calling upon God.

There never was a time when Christ was more misunderstood than now, for the very reason that we find at Calvary. There was never a time when fragments of the gospel were proclaimed with such assurance as the whole round truth. One man will take the Sermon on the Mount, and neglecting everything else say, This is Christianity. Another can think of nothing but the sacrifice: the whole of the gospel is in that for him. They are like the men who heard 'Eloi Eloi,' and said at once 'He is calling for Elias.' It is wonderful, I grant you, what a single word—what a mere fragment—will do for any soul. A few stray syllables, like a strand of rope, may save a sinner and bring him to the shore. But for you who are Christians that is not enough. You must study and strive to have a full rich gospel. To take a part and think it is the whole is the sure way of misunderstanding Christ. Therefore reject not uncongenial truths. Embrace the whole: come like a child to it. Believe that wherever God Almighty works, there must be infinite compass and unfathomable depth. So slowly, and amid many things you cannot reconcile, you will draw nearer to the truth as it is in Jesus, until at last in the land where there are no misunderstandings any more, you will know even as also you are known.

XXVIII

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Matt. ii. 11: 'When they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother.'

I NOTICE first of all that these wise men from the East came to the house at last. They had had a long and toilsome and perhaps a perilous journey; they had crossed the desert and they had forded rivers; yet spite of all hardship and difficulty and obstruction, here they were at their desired haven. There had been days when their journey seemed a failure, when they were tempted to renounce it altogether; they had knocked at door after door in Jerusalem seeking news, yet for a long time they had knocked in vain. They had thought to have found Jerusalem rejoicing—illuminated, may be, because its king was born; and men were trafficking and little children were playing, as if nothing remarkable had happened. They had said to each other as they battled across the desert, 'Our difficulties will be over when we reach Judæa. The roads will be thronged with pilgrims travelling kingwards, and we will join ourselves to one

of these singing companies.' But the roads were empty, and listen as they might, the wise men could not catch one burst of song. There were a thousand things to damp them and discourage them. It was almost impossible that they should be successful. Their Chaldean neighbours had told them it was folly when they set out a week or two before. But with magnificent enthusiasm they persevered—nothing could baffle them or daunt them or dismay them—and all that story of heroism is in these opening words, 'when they were come into the house.'

What a stirring and great history may lie under half a dozen commonplace words! A few quiet sentences, when the time of utterance comes, may cover the effort and the pain of years. It is not always in impassioned declamation that the deepest concerns of the human heart are spoken. There may be hardly the lifting of the voice, yet the words may tell of the tragedy of years. A young man may quietly say, 'I cannot do that,' and to the unobservant ear that may mean little; yet struggle and failure and repentance and prayer and promise may all be hidden in that quiet refusal. There is more heroism in a smiling face sometimes than in half of the deeds that are chronicled in battle. There may be more self-mastery in the doing of quiet duty than in the scourgings of a whole calendar of saints. A world of effort and of hope

deferred and of resolute uplifting of a man's brow again—all this may be hidden in such a simple sentence as 'when they were come into the house.'

The secret of the perseverance of these wise men is not hard to find. It sprang from this, that they were following a star. Had they been guided by anything less than that, they would have sunk down wearied long ago. Do you think, now, if they had read about this king in some of their Chaldean or Babylonian libraries—do you think that that literary discovery would have buoyed them up and carried them at last into the manger? It needed more than earth to carry them through; it needed the bright and beckoning radiance of the sky. They were strong because their guidance was a star. They looked to the lamp of heaven and not to earth's taper. And if they battled bravely, and journeyed with zeal unquenchable, and if nothing could turn them from their unheard-of quest, it was because they followed, not a light of earth, but a light that was hung aloft by God.

You may make up your mind that all the great enthusiasms have had at the heart of them something religious. When a man can follow a great purpose steadily, through ridicule and insult and obstruction, there is more than strength of will in it—there is God. He who sees no star never can be stable. He wanders vainly in a trackless wilderness. Conflicting voices reach him, he is perplexed;

he cannot tell whither he is tending. But when above all mists our eyes have seen the light, when we can say 'Come night or agony, God reigneth,' when we believe that no effort is in vain, and that there is not a pang but has a meaning in it, then life is filled with such a quiet purpose that like the wise men we come to the house at last.

We should never forget the variety of motives that brought men under that roof at Bethlehem. The house was an inn or caravanserai, and we know that at that season it was very full; the wise men from the East had varied company when they came into the house that nightfall. Merchants were there, and all manner of wayfarers, and men who had gathered in Bethlehem for the taxing. And they fell to eat and they chatted by the fire and they rehearsed their adventures by the way; but not a man of them dreamed that in that very building the Christ of God was born into the world. They came into the house and saw the child, and they said, This is no place for a tender child like that. They came into the house and saw the child, and they said, God have mercy on that poor mother there! But the wise men came, and when *they* saw they worshipped, and presented gold and frankincense and myrrh.

How blind most of us are! How little we know what is going on! We rise and journey and eat and go to rest and we know not what is being

transacted at our door. Tragedies happen, lives are altered in an hour, heroical deeds are done or are attempted, and you and I, living within a stone's throw, may never hear one whisper of it all. The isolation of a great city is pitiable. Who lives in that house a few doors off? We do not know. But one day the blinds are drawn, some one is dead; and there have been tears and watchings and breaking hearts within it; yet all the time we were happy with our children and could not have told you so much as our neighbour's name. Many a husband goes cheerily to business, in total ignorance of what his wife is suffering. Many a father would be amazed to-night if he knew the thoughts that were stirring in his daughter's heart. The greatest things are never obtrusive things. They are never clamorous or noisy or spectacular. How many are in the inn where Christ is born, yet they know nothing of the glory.

Do you observe why the wise men saw the King when all the others that night at Bethlehem were blind to Him? The simple reason is that they were seeking Him, and just because they were seeking Him, they saw. Where is He that is born King of the Jews—they had troubled all Jerusalem with their questions. They were more than star-gazers, they were anxious searchers not to be beaten off in their endeavour. And so where others saw nothing but a child, they saw,

because they had searched for Him, a king. We read that Cæsar came and saw and conquered; but these three wise men came and saw and worshipped; and to worship is sometimes better than to conquer, if they be not identical before the Throne. That is an exquisite title which John Bunyan gives to the church. You remember that he calls it the House Beautiful. When you are come into the House Beautiful which is the church the supreme question is, what do you see? It all depends on what you come to see. It all depends on what you have been seeking. If you seek to find fault you shall find it very easily, for neither preaching nor singing nor prayer is ever perfect. If you seek the fellowship of men and women you shall get it, for in the sanctuary men and women gather. But if you seek for more than that, if you seek light and guidance, if you seek power to live well, and power to die well, then poor though our worship be never a service shall pass, but you shall be blessed by seeing what you sought.

In closing will you notice this, that the wise men saw the young child *and His mother*: first the young child — it was a child-and-mother picture, not mother-and-child, as the catalogues describe it. There are Roman Catholics who cannot see the child, they are so taken up with gazing on the mother; but the wise men saw the child, and then in that very glance they saw

beautiful and peerless motherhood. They had found all they looked for and a little more, for they could never forget the look in Mary's face. It is always so when a man sees God for himself. We see the young child and—something over. Motherhood, fatherhood, duty and trial and burden—all are lit with a new radiance from that hour. Then like the wise men we go home again, but like them, warned of God, we go another way; for the old ways and the old days are done and dead, when once we have seen God in Jesus Christ.

XXIX

THE FEEDING OF THE LAMB

Rev. vii. 17: 'The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them.'

THE first words which John ever heard of Jesus were words that described Him as a Lamb. When John was a disciple of the Baptist's, drinking in inspiration from that stern teacher, he had heard these words fall from the Baptist's lips, 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' The apostle was a young man then, aflame with eager hope, and the words of the Baptist sank deep into his heart—so deep that through all his after years he loved to think of Jesus as the Lamb. What experiences John had had and what a vast deal he had suffered when he came to write this book of Revelation! Life and the world were different to him now from what they had been in the desert with the Baptist. Yet in Revelation some seven and twenty times John repeats the sweet expression Lamb of God—the first words he had ever heard of Christ. How blessed is a life when from its first stage

to its last there runs through it one regulating thought! What concentration it bestows on character! What vividness it gives to the perceptions! There are men who are everything by turns and nothing long—unstable as water they shall not excel. New ideas seize on them powerfully to-day, and other ideas as powerfully to-morrow. But men like John, grasping some great truth early, hold to it through storm and sunshine, through Babylon and Patmos, till it expands and breaks into a thousand meanings, and becomes a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

Various thoughts are at once suggested to me by the beautiful and musical message of our text; and I shall take the opportunity of this quiet morning of communion, to lay one or two of them before you.

The first is that Christ in heaven to-day is the very Christ who walked by the banks of Jordan. 'Behold the Lamb of God,' said the Baptist there; and 'in the midst of the throne, a Lamb as it had been slain.' In the opening chapter of this book of Revelation there is a strange and wonderful vision of the Lord: His head and His hairs were white as snow, and His eyes were as fire, and His feet were like fine brass as if they burned in a furnace. There is deep meaning in every line of that description; but perhaps the first thought to arise in us when we read it is that this

is not the Jesus whom we knew in Galilee. It is august and terrible—a vision of light and splendour—and John when he saw it fell at His feet as dead; but it is not like Him who agonised in Gethsemane, and whose tears fell beside the grave of Lazarus. But *here* it is the Lamb in the midst of the throne; as in the desert it had been the Lamb of God. Here, in the glory, it is the Lamb slain, as in Isaiah it had been a lamb led to the slaughter. And we feel at once that not all the height of heaven, nor all the inconceivable grandeurs of God's throne, have changed the nature or the love of Him who was pointed to beside the Jordan.

I think we all need to be assured of that, for we are very prone to disbelieve it. Somehow, we think, our Saviour in the glory, must be different from what He was long ago. We know that He is no longer rejected and despised, and we know that the body of His humiliation has been glorified, until insensibly we transfer these changes from His outward nature to His heart, as though death and resurrection had altered that. So do we conceive Christ as far away from us, separated from the beating of the human heart; glorious, yet not so full of tender brotherhood as in the days of Capernaum and Bethany. That error is combated by the vision of the Lamb in heaven. Purity, gentleness, and sacrifice are there. The

wrath of the Lamb grows terrible just as we remember that that wrath is love rejected and despised. And in the Last Judgment when the Lamb shall be our judge it will not be the majesty of God that will overwhelm us; it will be that we are face to face, at last, with the love and with the sacrifice of Christ.

Another thought which our text suggests is this, that we shall need Christ in heaven as much as we do here. The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them—even in heaven there shall be no feeding without Christ. I ask you to note how carefully in these verses John distinguishes between Jesus and His Father. Who shall feed the redeemed? The Lamb in the midst of the throne. Who shall wipe away their tears? Not the Lamb, but God. Now I cannot here dwell on the reasons—the deep reasons—why the consoling of heaven is named as the Father's work; what I ask you to note is that the satisfaction of glory is not a thing of course, that comes inevitably—it is entirely dependent on Christ Jesus. The Lamb which is in the throne shall feed them. On the Lamb depends the satisfaction of eternity. Heaven might be heaven, and God might still be there in His incommunicable and eternal splendour; but even in heaven the redeemed would starve, save for the Lamb in the midst of the throne.

We all know in some measure how great and how constant is our need of Christ on earth. There are moments—often moments of distress and darkness—when every true follower can truly say, 'Thou, O Christ, art all I want.' In the soberest senses it is the Lamb who feeds us *here* —it is on Him we are dependent for everything that nourishes us—without His love and His sacrifice and His revelation of God, there would be no spiritual pasturage on earth. But do we not sometimes think that death will change all that? Are we not prone to imagine that in the world beyond, the need of being nourished by Christ Jesus will be less? Have we not some dim idea that heaven is like a garden—so fair, so fragrant, and so beautiful in itself, that only to open our eyes there will be rest, and only to wander in its sunshine will be peace? However such an idea may arise within us, remember that it is not the conception of the Bible. The Lamb which is in the throne shall feed them; the need of Christ in heaven is supreme. Every tie that binds us to Him here is strengthened there; all feelings of dependence are infinitely deepened. All that we owe to Him on earth is but a tithe of what we shall owe to Him when we awake.

It is suggested, too, by the words of the original that this feeding shall be a perpetual process. Not once nor for a day shall the Lamb feed the

flock; He shall feed them continually and for ever. As John looked back on his discipleship in Galilee one feature of it impressed him very powerfully. It was that the Lamb of God, whom the Baptist had made him follow, had taught him everything gradually and slowly. One truth to-day, one miracle to-morrow, and always and only as the disciples could bear it; little by little, with perfect adaptation, had the Lamb led them into ever deeper knowledge. That was one mark of the feeding of the Lamb, and every year that he lived, John grew more grateful for it. He saw the patience and the gentle constancy with which he had been led into all truth.

And now in Patmos John lifts his eyes to heaven, and there are they who came out of great tribulation; and the Lamb is there—a Lamb as it had been slain—and the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them. What did that mean to John? What did it recall to him? It spoke to him of quiet perseverance. There was progress and ever-growing reception of the truth in heaven for John, and there was all that, because the Lamb was there.

Have you incorporated that thought into your view of glory? It is bound up with the true thought of Christ. Just because He is the same yesterday and for ever, there will be gradual unfoldings of joy through all eternity. It is true

we shall hunger no more, and we shall thirst no more. We shall be satisfied when we awake. Yet John had been satisfied in his first hour with Jesus, but what great and lofty truths had he still to learn! Not all at once shall the mysteries be solved, and every truth we have longed to know be taught us. Not all at once shall the full and glorious secret be flashed in its splendour on our awakened eyes. Through all eternity we shall go on to serve. Through all eternity we shall go on to learn. The love of God will expand and deepen endlessly so that every fresh hour will have its sweet surprise. Not God in the first person, but the Lamb—the gradual and patient teacher of the Twelve—the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them.

Lastly, and most significant of all, will you note the position in which the Lamb is standing. Be sure it is no chance that the saints are fed in glory by a Lamb who stands, where?—in the midst of the throne. Not in the confines of heaven, not on its distant borders, does the Lamb stand who shall pasture the redeemed. In the very centre and seat of power He has His place: He is the Lamb in the midst of the throne. There are few grander pictures in the Bible than John's conception of the heavenly kingdom. It is like one of those drawings by Doré of the Paradise of

Dante in which there is circle within circle of wheeling angels. That is the kind of vision which John had of glory, as if from its utmost and dim verge it were filled with ranks and choirs; and as the circles drew nearer and nearer to the centre, they were composed of nobler and more glorious beings. In the very centre of that mighty confluence was a throne—it was the throne of the immortal and eternal God. And in the very centre of the throne, standing in front of it, there was a Lamb. And not any angel from distant rank or choir; not even the flaming cherubim or glowing seraphim—not these, but the Lamb in the midst of the throne shall feed them. That means that the redeemed shall be fed not only gently, but by one who stands in the place of sovereign power. None can gainsay Him there; none can withstand Him; none can contest His access to green pastures. The Lamb who feeds them is in the midst of the throne—the sceptre of universal power is His now.

In this present world of shadows and of sorrow, have we not often longed for an authoritative voice? Are there not mysteries on every hand of us, that press with a terrible insistence on our hearts? And men try to explain these things to us, and such men may be taught of God, yet the noblest explanation leaves a ring of cloud so vast, that we can only bow the head and say, Now we

know in part and see in part. It is true that God does not leave us in the darkness—His word is a light unto our feet. When we trust Him there is always light for the next step, and it is the next step that is the road to glory. Still, there remains much doubt and much uncertainty, baffling us and sometimes overwhelming us, and these always will remain till one who knows us thoroughly speaks to us from the very centre of authority. That is the meaning of the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Before the mountains were created or the hills were formed, that throne was there. From it the worlds were created; from it the nations were fashioned; from it has gone forth the plan of every life. Every shadow was foreseen there, every tear and every grave—and from the midst of *that* throne the Lamb shall feed them. Does not that illuminate the joy that cometh in the morning? Does it not assure us that we shall be satisfied? With such thoughts let us approach the bread and wine, which are the symbols and pledges of the Lamb of God.

XXX

THE APOSTOLIC PARADOX

■ Cor. vi. 9: 'As unknown, and yet well known.'

It will at once occur to you how true this was of the apostles. There is not one of that first band of missionaries, who were sent out to evangelise the world, of whom we might not say in the words of our text, that they were unknown and yet well known. There are no names in Christendom to-day more honoured than the names of these evangelists. Wherever the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached, and wherever the Word of God is read and loved, the names of Peter and of James, of John and Thomas, are familiar in our ears as household words—yet how little we know of any one of them! We have a few glimpses of them in their work; we hear them speaking a few words of argument, or it may be we have a brief writing from their pen. But what their childhood was, and who their friends were; how they looked, or what befell them in old age—all this, and much more, is shrouded in the dark. Of all the disciples, then,

it is singularly true, that they are unknown and yet well known.

Nor does this hold only of the disciples. It is equally clear in the case of our Lord Himself. If our lot had been cast in Galilee while Jesus lived, there would have been few days in which we should not have spoken of Him. Men were intensely curious about Jesus, and every scrap of information was treasured. He was the daily topic of the market-place; when women gathered at the well they spoke about Him; the dullest peasant in the remotest village had been startled to attention by His miracles—Jesus of Nazareth was indeed well known. Yet after all how little they understood Him! In what obscurity He lived and wrought! Some thought He was Elias; others that He was Jeremiah; and not a few said 'He is beside Himself.' And outside Palestine was the wide and noisy world, with its senates and its markets and its armies, and into its voices of business and of pleasure there had never come one whisper of the Saviour. You see how true it was, then, even of Christ, that He was unknown and yet well known.

But if the words were true of the disciples and of Christ, they are not without truth for you and me. If we are striving to live the Christian life, this will also be one mark of our endeavour. I wish then this evening to handle that rich theme, and

to show how the gospel, carried out in life, will make a man unknown and yet well known.

First, then, '*unknown*'—I shall suggest to you some of the reasons that make the Christian life an unknown life.

Well, to begin with, Christianity lays its chief stress upon qualities that do not impress the imagination of the world. There is nothing to startle and nothing to arrest in the kind of disposition which it inculcates. The spirit that is enforced in the beatitudes is not the spirit which the world applauds. What are the qualities that men admire? What is it that draws the attention of the crowd? Is it not brilliant gifts, or consummate cleverness, or physical prowess, or audacity? I need not remind you that you look in vain for these in the programme of the Galilean. 'And He opened His mouth and taught them saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the meek; blessed are the merciful; blessed are the peacemakers.' It is not a moral temper such as that which makes a man the idol of the street. Our Lord deliberately laid His emphasis on the undramatic qualities of life. With a true insight into what was noblest, and a true scorn for what was merely showy, He caught the mighty and hurled them from their seat, and exalted those of low degree. Instead of pride, Jesus proclaimed humility;

instead of revenge of injuries, longsuffering; endurance was to supplant retaliation, and tender mercy the old and passionate hatreds. And it is the crowning of these unobtrusive virtues, and the recognition of these voiceless things, that make the Christian as a man unknown.

Again the distinctive exercises of the Christian are exercises which he never can reveal.

Among all the differences between the pagan faiths and the faith which is our treasure and our glory, none is more marked or more notable than the change from an outward to an inward worship. It is almost impossible for us to realise how wholly external the old religions were. The idea that a man might move among his fellows, carrying all his religion in his heart, would have been laughed to scorn in pagan Rome. It was under the shadow of consecrated temples, or where the altar stood ready for the oxen, or within the sacred circle of the augur, or in the brilliant procession through the streets, it was in such scenes that the religious life of paganism found its peculiar and distinctive exercises. It knew not the secret of the closed door, nor of the head anointed during fasting.

I need hardly stay to tell you how Jesus Christ has come and changed all that. The distinctive exercises of the Christian life are not procession and sacrifice and augury. The distinctive exercises of the Christian life are exercises which

we never can reveal. Could you conceive of anyone in earnest making a parade of secret prayer? Are there not hours of fellowship with heaven which would be tarnished if we talked of them? Do we ever speak of these minute denials, or of those strengthenings of the will in little things which every honest Christian practises? All that is most distinctive in the Christian—his prayer, his battle, his joy, his cross-bearing—takes place in the mystical room with the closed door. And it is this—the silence and the secret—that makes the Christian as a man unknown.

Again, the distinctive service of the Christian life is not a service that attracts attention.

When a man embarks on a political career, he knows that the reward of eminence is fame. Just in proportion to his genius or eloquence, will the eyes of a waiting nation turn towards him. When a man adopts a military career, he hopes for some action that may bring him glory. He dreams of the doing of some gallant deed and the awaking to find that he is famous. In the life of politics, then, as in the life of war, a certain notoriety is quite inevitable, and he who wins the laurel in the senate, or shows conspicuous courage in the field, is certain to attract attention.

But the distinctive service of the Christian life is not a service that attracts attention. There is no glitter and no glamour in it. There is none

of the pomp and circumstance of war. It is a quiet and a lowly service; it is a work of faith and a labour of love; like the Lord who inspires it, it will not strive nor cry, nor lift up its voice in the streets. It climbs the dark stair and enters the wretched home where the poor wife, perchance, is lying on a sickbed, still hoping against hope and praying to God that her husband come not reeling home to-night, and there it ministers with unwearied patience, and with a love that will not let them go. It gathers the children into the mission-school, prays over them and visits them at home, and spite of discouragement it perseveres, for it hears the Saviour saying 'Feed my Lambs.' It visits the fatherless and widows in affliction, it sings in the hospitals, it stands at the prison gates. It comes like a glimpse of sunshine to the poor-house; it takes the fallen by the hand and calls her sister. All that is going on in this great city. Yet when you open your paper you never read of that. You read of pantomimes and of concerts and of the fiscal question and of the discussions in the House of Commons. The truest service of the Christian life is never a service that attracts attention. The kingdom cometh not with observation. The seed was growing while the farmer slept. It is this lowly and unnoticed service, done for the sake of Him who died for us, that makes the Christian as a man unknown.

But I have yet to mention the deepest of all reasons, and I shall give it you in the apostle's words. 'For ye are dead,' says Paul in a great passage, 'and your life is hid with Christ in God.' Mysterious words—deep beyond our searching; yet boundless in encouragement and hope! For they tell us that if we be Christ's indeed, our true life cannot be seen of men; it is hidden with Jesus Christ in God's pavilion till the day comes when it shall be revealed. When on a frosty night you look up at the pole-star, have you never said of it 'unknown and yet well known?' There is not a sailor in our hemisphere but knows it. It is the first star which we point out to our children. There are countless stars whose names we never learn, but the pole-star is well-known to all. But are there mountains in it and are there valleys? Are there lakes and seas or are there living creatures? 'Ah,' says the sailor when I ask him that, 'I don't mean that I know it in *that* sense.' Unknown and yet well known, you see, and unknown because hung aloft in heaven; and ye are dead and your life is hid in heaven, with one who is the bright and morning star. If, then, you are truly following Christ never be anxious to explain yourself; do not be eager to be understood, and never grow feverish to be recognised. Take up thy cross; study to be quiet; redeem the time, follow the gleam bravely. Remember that

with all the saints you are to walk heavenward as a man unknown.

Now briefly, in the second and closing place, as unknown—'*yet well known.*' Spite of the obscurity of the Christian life, it is true that the Christian is well known.

First, he is well known when he little thinks of it. I have often been struck in preaching throughout Scotland with one feature of our church's life. I do not think I was ever in a parish where there was not one elder who stood out from all his brethren, as a man of wisdom and of the spirit and of prayer. Those of you who were trained in country homes, perhaps more especially in country manses, will, I am sure, corroborate what I say. The elder may have lived in the humblest circumstances, and been utterly unknown to the great world beyond, but every one trusted him and every one revered him and every one knew that he was a man of God. No one had ever seen him at secret prayer, yet no one ever doubted that he prayed. He never whispered what his right hand was doing, yet somehow all the village had the news. He moved about, happy to be unknown, and never dreaming how well known he was. There is a deep sense in which that holds true of all loyal followers of Christ. Their life is telling where they never think it and their influence is far wider than they dream. The

world is full of eager and watchful eyes, and there is not a man so poor but has his audience. Some one is always helped or always hindered by the kind of life we lead from day to day. Back to thy duty then; take up thy cross. Resume thy service with all its disappointment. There are hearts that are thanking God for thee to-day—thou art unknown, and yet well known.

Again, the Christian is well known in heaven. In that great world where God the Father is, and where there is one like to the Son of Man; in that eternal home where the angels are, and where they watch with profoundest interest this earthly drama, there is nothing of more absorbing interest than the struggle and the service of the saint. Many of our estimates are overturned in heaven. There are strange reversals of magnitude in glory. Things that seem mighty here are trifles there; and the world's least is sometimes heaven's greatest. We often read of deafening applause, and it may be that the applause *is* deafening in the little area of some city-hall. But the same applause, given in a Highland glen, would hardly waken an echo in the corries, and not a sound of it would reach the ear of him who was standing on the mountain-top. So, much of the noisy cheering of the world has died away before it reaches glory; and yet all heaven was watching Jesus Christ who would not strive nor cry nor lift up

His voice in the streets. It is the trials and triumphs of the spirit that are of vital interest to the spirit world. It is the cry and the yearning of the soul which echo in the heart of the Redeemer. There is not a prayer that we utter but He hears it. There is not a temptation we master but He sees it. We cannot do the smallest deed of kindness but like a dove it flies back to the ark. Unknown—yes, the Christian is always that; and yet I think he is well known in heaven.

Then, lastly, the Christian may be unknown now, but he shall be well known in the last judgment.

If there be any truth in the gospel which we preach, and to which at the Sacrament you set your seal, the day is coming when the books will be opened and the small and great shall be summoned before God. You will be there and I shall be there; we shall be face to face with Almighty God at last. And swift as a flash of thought all that we were and did shall leap into light before ten million eyes. I forbear to dwell upon the awful misery of the man or woman whose life has been a lie. Faced by that God who is a consuming fire, and still more, faced by the love of Christ, what words in the whole range of human speech, could tell the horror of that last unmasking? God grant that it be not thus with you and me! But ah! what words shall ever tell the joy of the last judgment if we have

really been trusting Christ and fighting heavenward! 'Lord,' we shall say, 'was it I who prayed these prayers, was it I who gave that cup of water to the little one? I had quite forgotten it. It had passed away from me.' But the Lord shall answer, 'Child, I never forget.' 'Lord,' we shall say, 'was it I who won that soul in the days when I laboured in the Sunday School? I thought my work was a failure with the lad.' So all that we ever strove to be and do, our secret hope, and cry, and struggle, and victory —all shall be written out and meet us again when we stand before the judgment seat of God. And then we shall understand what our text means, 'As unknown, and yet well known.'

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